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"She was a very will-o'-the-wisp."

[Page 105.]

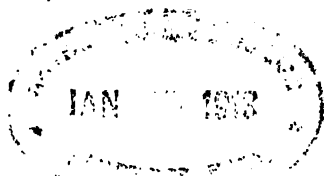
# THE OUTPOST OF ETERNITY

BY  
COSMO HAMILTON



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# The Outpost of Eternity

## PART I

### CHAPTER I

**H**E looked like a man who had to do with horses. His face was round, plump and red—the red of health and weather. He was utterly clean-shaven, but his hair was so fair that he had the appearance of a man who never shaved. Only his eyes saved him from being taken for a groom. He might have been a trainer of horses. He looked capable and as though he had had control of men. His manner was easy and he obviously took a certain amount of pains over his clothes. He wore a colored shirt and a colored collar to match it, a hard collar, and his tie was palpably Duke Street. There was nothing aggressively horsey about his clothes, but the seams of his coat were marked out, as they were down the leg of his trousers. His boots, blacking boots, had leather uppers of a very shiny red. He seemed to have pockets everywhere with flaps to them, and beneath the one on his left breast a touch of handkerchief showed, a heliotrope handkerchief with round white spots. His bowler had a flat brim

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and his gloves of bright leather were inlaid in the palms and forefingers. The man looked as though he had been born with a straw in his mouth.

The porters at Paddington instinctively touched their hats to him, although they had never seen him before, and the young man at the paper stall grinned warmly when he gave him change, bent forward and asked him: "Know anything for to-day, sir?" Lord Thoresby returned the grin and shook his head. "Couldn't tell you the names of a single horse runnin'," he said. "Bin out of the country for about a thousand years."

The paper stall man watched him move away among the heterogeneous rush of passengers. He was interested. His quiet movements, his steady, examining eye, were different from those to whom the station was obviously a too well-known place. He walked about like a man quietly noting the changes that had taken place in a once familiar scene. The engines had something about them which caught his attention. The appearance of the refreshment room, the little kiosk which gleamed with tobacco tins and boxes of cigarettes, the railway advertisements with drawings of hefty little boys paddling and young amazons in spotless ducks driving on a verdant green golf course with gleaming cliffs behind them, were all noticed. The passing Corporal of the Grenadier Guards made him turn. There were differences in his uniform. In fact, nothing escaped his notice. Men, women and things, sounds and smells had their interest, and when finally he got into a corner seat of a third-class smok-

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ing carriage and quietly loaded a pipe it was with a curious smile, half pathetic, half amused.

"Dashed odd!" he said to himself. "*I don't seem to have changed. I feel the same. But twenty-three years has made the devil's own difference to everything else.*" He heaved a sigh and gave a chuckle. "Well, what's it matter? I'll bet my life on one thing. Dear old Tony Okehampton's the same. And there's something in that."

There was everything in that. This man Thoresby, known twenty-three years ago as Billy Russon, had one illusion left, only one. It was that Tony Okehampton, handsome, sunny, fair-haired, generous, clean-minded old Tony Okehampton would always be the same, however old, bitter, cheap and pessimistic the world became, and when he returned to England after an absence of what he rather more picturesquely than was his wont dubbed a thousand years, the first thing he felt impelled to do was to find Tony Okehampton.

Find was hardly the word. He had left him standing on the steps of a warm old house in Buckinghamshire, the Chiltern hills behind, two counties lying spread out at its feet. There he would be, the same Tony Okehampton, standing on the same steps of the same warm old house, with the same Chilterns behind and the same two counties in front.

It was a curious thing that in this man's irreligious, irregular, slipshod, not far short from dishonest, untidy mind there had always been a note of sentiment in regard to the man with whom he had been at Eton



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and Oxford. During the many times when he had been down and out, when he had been reduced to driving an engine in Nebraska or conducting a tram-car in New York or endeavoring to pick up an adventurous living as a commercial traveler in Argentina, or when, with others of the same kidney, he had worked early and late on a Canadian fruit farm, Billy Thoresby let his thoughts go wandering until they rested upon the charming personality of his old friend. He, at any rate, ran dead straight. This was a conviction, a fixed idea, something that gave him a sense of deep pleasure. Tony Okehampton was the only man of his set who was not a wrong 'un, who could never be a wrong 'un. It filled Thoresby with a feeling not unlike that of patriotism. It meant a good deal to this man of heterogeneous occupations, who knew the world as well as the middle-aged city clerk knows his financial paper. It was a sort of habit of his to say to himself: "Well, all the old gang has gone under. We've all scrambled and dodged about cheatin' God and man, goin' the crooked ways, but old Tony Okehampton remains what he always was. And that's something!"

There are men who say with a touch of snobbish pride that they have been to school with So-and-So, who is perhaps at the top of some particularly noticeable ladder. There are others, untraveled men, who boast that they know Paris backward. Thoresby found continual satisfaction in the fact that Tony Okehampton was still what he had always backed him to be, a damn good chap, b'God! a white man. ▲

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He was not the only one. Of the few remaining members of the Okehampton set who sometimes whistled "For Auld Lang Syne" in the odd corners of the world there were two rowing blues, a boxing blue, a First in Greats, and one or two more who applied the word Okehampton to anything for which they had an irrevocable respect and affection. They knew themselves just as Thoresby did, and they liked to think that they knew Okehampton.

There were two reasons why Thoresby made a point of seeing Okehampton before he did anything else on his return to England. The first was to get just that amount of egotistical satisfaction which finding oneself right alone can give, and the second to show himself to Okehampton under his new name and in his new whitewash. He was no longer Billy Russon. He was, thank you very much, the Earl of Thoresby. It was devilish amusin'. He was no longer the poor devil without a shilling to his back or an ounce of credit to his name, who got meat and drink by the skin of his teeth. He was an English peer, and, therefore, a man of weight and respectability. Doors which must have been shut in his face would now be opened wide at his approach. The keenest memory would now conveniently forget his long list of shadinesses. Those who would not have been seen in the same acre patch as Billy Russon would jostle each other to stand within arm's length of my friend Lord Thoresby, you know. Like a man who, proud of his personal appearance, had long hidden himself away because his face had been rendered disgusting by some

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hideous skin complaint and came out again radiant with a new complexion, Thoresby wanted with a sort of boyish eagerness to present himself again to his almost abnormal pal smiling beneath his metaphorical robes. It was very natural and human and it would have been all the jollier had he been able to rattle in his new pockets several coins. But a man can't have everything. Billy Russon was, at the moment, more than contented to have stepped into the shoes and the name made famous by his father. As a peer he had no doubt whatever that the regrettable absence of coins in his pocket would very soon be remedied.

## CHAPTER II

**T**HE man who had put the flying country through a searching examination had never expected to see it again. Mounted policeman, cowpuncher, bronco buster, barkeeper, waiter, engine-driver, telegraphist, steward, farm hand, palmist and crystal gazer, billiard sharper, bookmaker, and an expert in all the many professions for which the man who lives on his wits serves no apprenticeship, he discovered that he was the new Lord Thoresby while in Sydney, Australia. It happened that, at the moment, he was traveling for a new toothwash and was in more or less affluent circumstances. That is to say that he had drawn a matter of twenty pounds on account of commission and possessed two suits of clothes which he had been lucky enough to get on tick. He had seen the news of his father's death in the morning paper. It had been cabled from England. He read that the deceased peer, who had held most of the important posts in a series of Unionist governments, was succeeded by his eldest son, the Hon. William Russon, most of whose life was devoted to big game shooting.

"The King is dead," said Billy. "Long live the King!" He grinned a little at the completely non-

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committal description of his occupation and went off at once to a hosier's shop, where he bought a black band for his white dump hat and a black tie. He had no grudge against his father. He considered him to be an ornament and almost an institution. At the same time, he had often speculated in his unpleasant, wakeful hours how he came to be the father of such a son. He was a firm believer in heredity. There must have been something, some closely guarded tendency in his father's character of which few men had been aware. His mother was altogether blameless. The next thing that he did was to send a cable to the family solicitors asking them to telegraph enough money to the Bank of Australasia in Sydney to pay his fare to England. On leaving Australia for home he omitted to return either the samples of toothwash or the small sum on account of commission to his employers. He had a sort of wish to leave the long trail characteristically. Many other tailors had been done by him before. In any case they were not good suits. The trousers were execrable.

He found England extraordinarily small and park-like. It seemed to him that the towns through which the train passed on the way to King's Redesborough were mere toys. They made him laugh. He missed the boasting advertisements of America and Australia, the blatant skyscrapers and all the newness and rawness and noise of these places. He asked himself what could be the ultimate fate of a nation which refused to enter in the race, which deliberately stood still. He looked at the little red villas with their

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small gables and patch-like gardens which surrounded the stations of the places within twenty and twenty-five miles of London and wondered how it was that Englishmen could be contented to live year after year in such narrowness, so ambitionless. He gradually came to regard himself as a pioneer returning from his triumphs rather than as a waster coming back to a country of honest, easily satisfied, hard-working men.

He had been to King's Redesborough two or three times in the old days. He spent his holidays there once from Eton when Tony's father was alive. He made one of a large party which stayed at Quennor for the coming-of-age celebrations of the man who had already come into his own. His final visit had been to borrow money from Tony to take him out of the country with somewhat inconvenient celerity. He was going back to it now after twenty-three years to ask for board and lodging and whatever sport there might be going while his solicitors sold things for him. All the money had been left to his younger brother, an uncommonly deserving person. There were, however, two or three houses that could be sold, he hoped, and a fine collection of pictures. His brother possessed a house and was far too deserving to take much interest in art.

He found King's Redesborough very much as he had expected to find it. A large and airy station with open country on its left and a few straggling cottages on its right, with one or two newish garden-city-like villas dotted here and there, lay in a dip a mile or so from the town. Billy decided to walk and ask his

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way, leaving his luggage at the station to be called for later. He had no doubt whatever that Tony Okehampton would be at home. Tony Okehampton was the sort of man who was always at home. He was married and had children and was the Squire. He was, of course, also a magistrate and the chairman of the Unionist Association, the Horticultural Society, the Farmers' Association, and all the rest of it. Billy walked because he wanted to get into the right mood and to be in a sort of way cleaned up by the exquisitely fresh air before coming face to face with the simple, excellent people who stood for all that was best in English life.

As he went along the old road, lined on the one hand with well-kept cottages and frequent inns and open on the other hand to the rolling country, Billy drew a tender picture of his friend's wife and children. Mrs. Tony must be tallish, with abundant hair and a soft laugh, fearless, proud eyes, and a mouth which had never been the home of an untruth. She must wear a mushroom hat and gardening gloves and be followed always by an oldish spaniel and by robins which fluttered from tree to tree, from bush to bush, and passed the time of day with her. She must have at least three sons, the eldest of them not far short of twenty-one, and a young edition of herself, with hair flying behind her, the apple of her father's eye. He had no need to revise his picture of Tony himself. It would be hypersubtle to touch his hair with gray and his face with lines. No man with such a laugh could ever grow old. No man with such a heart could

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ever lose youth. Just to see this man again would be good. It would not matter if, having a full house, he could not put up the wanderer. He was a peer, and to obtain credit was easy. There were plenty of hotels in London.

Billy remembered the schoolhouse. It was the same, no larger, no smaller. He remembered the thickly thatched roofs in the houses at the end of the road and the name of the baker in the wide main street. He remembered the forge on the left and the inn which called itself a hotel on the right, with its old-fashioned hanging sign and its large courtyard and stables. He remembered the old market place on whose posts parish notices were stuck. But the bank was new to him. He came to a full stop at the top of the street, beaten as to whether he went to the right or to the left. An old man was sweeping the road, a merry old man with straggling wisps of hair and a back bent double with rheumatism.

"Quennor?" said Billy. "Which way?"

"Eh?"

"Quennor!" shouted Billy. "Squire Okehampton's."

"Oh! Okehampton's! Straight up the 'ill and bear 'round to your right all the way. . . . Okehampton, ah!"

It seemed to Billy that there was a note of the sort of admiration which one old rip has for another in this septuagenarian's voice. He went as directed, finding himself in a wide, well-made road not too frequently rushed over by motors. There was open country again to the left, a very kaleidoscope of open



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country glorified by the sun, and on his right, high up, cut sharply in the chalk side of a peaked hill, a great cross. Here, if you like, was England, a corner of the beautiful garden of the placid country which did not seem to be aware of the fact that it was being undermined by mole-like politicians and which did not dream that socialistic rats were eating away her very vitals. Bill was strangely devoid of the bump of geography. Coming to another, though much smaller, village, he could not make up his mind whether to turn up to the right or go straight on. He saw a man leaning on the saddle of a bicycle talking to another who stood at the gate of a cottage. The latter wore the unmistakable look of a tax collector. The former might have been a hosier who won billiard tournaments. His tie was flashy and his mouth loose. Billy went up. "I wish you'd tell me whether I'm right for the Squire's?" he said.

He saw a curious, angry glint in the eye of one man and a gleam of insolent familiarity all over the face of the other.

"Tony Okehampton, eh? Oh, yes. You're right enough. If you've got anything for him, look out you don't get a charge of rabbit shot in the calves."

This was Greek to Billy, and as he went on it was with a puzzled line between his eyebrows. It was all very curious. Was this the new spirit of disrespect? Or what was it? He expected that the very mention of the Squire's name to these village people would bring a respectful smile to their faces. He dismissed the impression, however, from his mind. People had

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altered. Places had altered. Customs had altered. But there was one man and one place that would never alter—Anthony Okehampton of Quennor.

The new peer came face to face suddenly with the old house. It stood perched high up against a background of beech trees, a forest of beech trees which wailed and murmured like lost and distracted souls in the winter and in the summer whispered softly or were silent. Yes, there was the old house still, long and low and comfortable, everything about it definite, its period stamped upon its face, its gardens on a series of terraces kept with spinster-like primness, its door always hospitably open.

The man of many pasts and a somewhat Gilbertian future was as hard as steel. He tackled the hill in front of him as though it were level ground. He kept laughing softly to himself as he went. It was his way of covering up his emotion. He didn't care who caught him with a little break in his voice. He knew that he was making a sort of pilgrimage in order to stand before a man who was not merely white but whom he had backed to remain white. There was great satisfaction in his having won his money.

It would have afforded the professional psychologist considerable amusement and some astonishment—the sight of this horsy, compact little man with moist eyes tramping relentlessly up a break-neck hill to pay genuine deference to a person whose virtues he admired, but whose precepts he had never followed.

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There was a stretch of park-like land at the top. An avenue of trees divided it, and here and there it was cut into by clumps of furs encircled with railings. A beautifully designed iron gate topped with the arms of the Okehamptons stood open. There was an old lodge at the foot of the park. Its little garden was alight with flowers. A fat tabby cat was stretched out asleep on the twisted branch of an apple tree. Birds sang everywhere. An elderly woman was hanging washing on a line. It was twenty-three years since Billy had passed through this gate and then he had looked back at it with affectionate eyes, for in his pocket there was a check made out to himself for five hundred pounds signed by Anthony Okehampton.

A hen, shrieking like a suffragist, scuttled away at his approach, and a squirrel, half way up the drive, performed an acrobatic feat for his edification up the thick trunk of a tree. Billy had no eye for the gardens. His attention was riveted on the open front door of the house. Somehow he was disappointed in not finding Tony, handsome, breezy, excellent Tony, standing on the old steps framed by the Jacobean doorway. It seemed to him that the place was strangely devoid of life. No gardeners moved about. He could detect no clucking sound of lawn mowers at work, which was associated in his mind with English gardens. No dog ran out with a friendly bark and wagging tail. He noticed with a sense of shock that several of the windows were broken and that one of them had been mended with a piece of newspaper. It irritated him. He would as soon have ex-

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pected to see a smudge upon his mother's face. He stood outside the door and gave the old familiar whistle invented at Eton and practiced at Oxford. There was no answer. He called out, "Tony, old man! Tony!" and again there was no answer. He put his hand on the bell and rang loudly. No one came. He went into the hall quickly, the great hall with its oak gallery and full length oil paintings of Okehamptons. A curious smell came to his nostrils—a sort of last night's smell of stale cigar smoke and beer. The rugs on the parquet floor lay about in debauched attitudes, and the floor itself, unpolished and dirty, was riddled with nail marks. Empty and half empty bottles stood upon a long narrow oak table and there were cigar ends everywhere. Several coffee cups, some of them minus handles, looked oddly ashamed of themselves. The saucers of two of them were filled with pipe ash. There was a tortoise shell hair comb on the floor at his feet and a pair of stays dangled obscenely over the gallery facing him. Something made him stride quickly across the hall and stand beneath the well-painted portrait of Tony's father that hung in the place of honor over the great fireplace. The canvas was riddled with bullets. One of them had cut a hole in the center of the forehead and against it were scratched the initials of Tony himself.

"Good God!" said Billy aloud.

Had death been here? If so it was a ribald, wasteful, drunken, desecrating figure.

An untidy, dejected-looking woman came into the hall.

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Billy turned to her. "What's wrong with the Squire?" he asked.

The woman scoffed. "Why don't you ask what's wrong with all of us?" she said.

"Is he—well?"

"Depends what you call well."

A sort of shiver ran over Billy. He felt as though he were standing on a catacomb and that a bat had touched his mouth with its wing. He asked the woman several other questions and received no answer, only a sulky grumble. He went over to her and took her by the shoulders. "Where's my friend?" he asked hoarsely. "Damn you! Why don't you answer me?"

"Damn *you*!" said the woman and shook herself free. "Friend, indeed! Why come *here* to look for him? Go to the pub in the village. That's his place. There's nothing to drink in these cellars."

"I don't understand," said Billy feebly. "What hellish brute has laid a jetta on this house, on Tony Okehampton's house, on Tony Okehampton?"

"Oh, don't bother me."

Billy turned and fled. The reek of the place sickened him. The echo of derisive laughter that seemed to ring around the gallery made him break into perspiration. He went out into the sunlight and stood quite still. He now saw that the grass of the gardens was rank, that there was moss on all the paths and that flowers grew wild. He moved forward out into the road through the gate. Instinctively he turned to the left, went along until he came to the village of small thatched cottages. He seemed to be passing

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through a Christmas card. The place seemed too beautiful and old-fashioned to be true. In the middle of the village up several narrow brick steps stood a small laborers' inn. High above the coarse voices of farm hands Billy heard the gay laugh of Tony Okehampton.

Feeling as cold as though he had been suddenly stricken with ague, the man of many pasts who had been temperamentally unable to go straight went up the steps and stood outside the open window of the parlor. He saw a bulbous man, a sort of village Falstaff, his great calves bulging in gaiters, his fat face thrown back, laughter gurgling from his mouth. He saw a thin, sly-looking poacher-like man with the marks of chalk on his clothes, giggling drunkenly. He saw several aged, bird-like villagers with cutty pipes stuck in their toothless gums. In the middle of them, sprawling on a chair, tie awry, and fair hair sprinkled with gray, a pint pot of beer held in the well-shaped hand, the white man, Tony Okehampton, flabbily and horribly drunk.

### CHAPTER III

**T**HE man, who now had no illusions, remained looking into the window. This unshaven, unkempt, bloodshot-eyed, saddened wreck of a man, with enough of his former beauty—because that was the word—still hanging to him, with the same irresistible turn of the head, the same broad shoulders and deep chest and peculiarly well-formed hands which were used almost as a Latin uses them, was Anthony Okehampton. To Billy he looked like a racing yacht which had sunk and been hauled up after a month or two.

He stood there with stupid, inane laughter ringing in his ears and the filthy smell of shag offending his nostrils, searching in his mind for excuses. "There must be somethin'!" he thought. "There *must* be. Oh, gee, there must be! His wife's dead. His children have been carried off by some epidemic, small-pox, something, anything. He's mad, he's gone off his head. He's *not* Tony Okehampton. He's only the shell of him."

Yes, that was it. That *must* be it. The house showed the madness. Very well, then, he stood in need of a friend. That was something.

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And so poor old Billy Russon, deprived of his long-looked-forward-to desire, found himself undergoing a mental somersault. He, the much-patched kettle, was to assume a sort of superiority over this broken urn. My God, what satire! He went into the public house parlor and stood in front of Tony Okehampton. He seemed to be very clean among those men. He wasn't able to speak. He held out his hand.

Tony looked him up and down. "Why not?" he said. "Everybody's friend, eh, b'God? Here's how, then!" and he shook the hand of the man whose face he failed to recognize. "Well, old boy, what's yours?"

Billy shook his head.

"Rot and nonsense! We all drink here, everyone of us, man, woman, child and beast. It's the most drunken little spot in England. We only live once, y'know, eh, boys?"

"Aye, aye, Squire! That's so."

"Mac, you puddin'-faced Scotch pig, give this gentleman a quart."

"Tony, old man," said Billy quietly, "don't you remember me?"

Tony threw back his head and gave a great laugh. "Remember you? 'Course I remember you. You're that sanguinary little Beddington bookmaker who's touched me down for thousands. You're almost a blood relation. You've had most of mine. Come on, Mac! Good God, how slow these blasted Scotchmen are!"

Billy persisted. The poor man was mad. "No, no, dear old man," he said. "I'm Russon, Billy Russon."



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Don't you remember? Tarver's, you know, and New College."

"Oh, hell!" said Tony. "Come on, stuff this down!" and he handed him the tankard. "You're too sober, old boy. It's funny. Wait a second! We drink toasts here. I give you my beautiful wife and my two charming gels, roarin', rantin', clever little devils all. Now then, let it go."

Billy hesitated. Instantly a hand shot out, tipped up the tankard and the quart of good ale made a puddle upon the floor. At least a pint of it trickled down Billy's clothes.

Instantly Tony was on his feet. "Oh, my dear fellow," he said. "By Jove, I'm sorry. How careless. Dash it, how absolutely, hopelessly, rottenly rustic! *Do* forgive me!" In the most Elizabethan manner he started to dab the wet places with a dirty handkerchief.

"It doesn't matter," said Billy.

"Awfully nice of you to say so, but it does matter. One gets so frightfully slack, buried away in these little holes. Mac, refill this tankard. Go on! Mr. Whatshisname's had an accident. I beg your pardon. What name did you say?"

"Russon," said Billy.

"Russon—Russon." Tony shook his head. "Are you the coach maker at Little Bledlow? No, of course not. You're a gentleman. Do forgive me. God, it must be about ten years since I met a gentleman. Ah, here we are." For the second time he handed the tankard.

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Billy drank deeply. There was a very nasty taste in his mouth. Then he said: "I've just been to Quennor."

"Oh, have you?" said Tony dryly. "The devil you have! What do I owe you? Now look here, seriously, who the devil are you?" The man began to get angry. He put himself into a fighting attitude. His dull blue eyes did their best to look fierce. They looked like lamps whose glasses were covered with mud. "I don't want any damned man hanging about Quennor. If I owe you anything, send in your bill. Play the game. I play the game. I've paid you off thousands in my time. You're all damned thieves, the lot of you."

"You owe me nothing," said Billy.

Instantly Tony's whole manner changed. To find a man to whom he owed nothing was almost an adventure. He clapped two cordial hands on Russon's shoulders. "Then, b'Jove, you're a friend," he said. "And I'll tell you what. There are about twenty-two spare bedrooms at Quennor. They're yours. Take the damned lot! Let me put you up and I'll drink you under the table every night of the week. It's a beautiful old place, Quennor. Do you know it? Been in my family for generations. Okehampton my name is, b'God! Tony Okehampton, everybody's friend. I'm the blot on the escutcheon!" He roared with laughter and then grew eager in a staggering kind of way. "Yes, that's the notion. You stay with me. You'll be my honored guest and meet my wife and daughters, talented people, although they're devils, the lot of 'em. Is that a bet, sir?"

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"Thanks very much," said Billy.

"Oh, that's toppin'," said Tony warmly. "You're a sportsman. Come on, let's go 'round there. I'll show you the place. Good morning, boys! Chalk these drinks up to me, Mac. I come into a hundred thousand next Friday, or a hundred and fifty thousand, I forget which. Money to burn!" He lurched and took Billy's arm and together they made their way out of the public house with laughter trickling after them.

When they got on the road and were passing between the almost unbelievably pretty cottages, Tony drew up and stood in front of his new friend. "Old boy," he said, "I'm not the man I used to be. I think you'd better know it." His face broke and several beery tears ran down his cheeks. "I was a better man than you once, old boy. A pretty good sort of a feller. It's not my fault. I've been driven into this. Talking about bein' a man's fault, did I ever tell you that toppin' good story?" . . .

He was laughing again. Billy wished him dead. This was not madness. It was beer. "Let's get home," he said.

"Home!" echoed Tony. "Wait a second. Now I come to look at you—Why, good God!—Did you say Russon, Billy Russon?"

"Yes, Russon. Billy Russon."

"Old Billy Russon! Why, dammit, you're a friend of mine. You were at Eton with me and Oxford. You're old Thoresby's son. The bad pup of the pack. Why, Billy, my dear old friend, this is it! This is

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just it. This is the moment of my life. Why the devil didn't you say so? I'm mighty glad to see you." He shook him by the hand and patted him on the shoulder and tilted his hat back and dug him in the ribs and almost danced around him. For the moment some of the old irresistible blue came back into his eyes, something of what seemed to be the spirit of unquenchable boyishness back into his manner.

The warmth of his welcome touched Billy. He had looked forward to this. He laughed a little to hide his emotion and said: "Tony! My dear old Tony!"

"Now I come to think of it I remember hearin' our old whistle just now. It was like a note struck on a dead piano. I'm all the gladder to see you, dear old friend, because, b'God, you're the burger who owes me five hundred quid and I can do with a bit!"

Billy felt like a pricked bladder.

## CHAPTER IV

**T**HE clock with a slow, dignified, reverberating bell struck four. Some moments later one that was more alert and even perhaps a little irritable struck eleven. Thoresby looked at his watch. It was a quarter to two. He had been sitting for an hour and a half in the room which Tony Okehampton had called his own—a room with a great bay window which framed a glorious picture of rolling downs, here and there showing patches of white chalk, curious cup-like patches, here and there grass covered, and in one place dotted with what appeared to be an army of black-coated, stunted men running amuck. These were in reality gorse bushes out of flower. The window was wide enough to take in a big slice of beech forest in full leaf, but with all the winter's dead things at the feet of the trees, a very carpet of rich brown. The sun moved in waves with ebb and flow, up and over and back again, touching everything as it passed with a golden hand.

For an hour and a half the man whose days had been punctured by cunning resourcefulness listened in stony silence to Tony Okehampton's endless stream of drunken confidences. He heard him laugh, a poor substitute for the old gay laugh of Eton and Oxford. He saw his sagged face pucker up like a hurt child's.

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He watched his shaky, unclean, expressive hand as it illustrated all that he said. He took quiet stock of the well-cut clothes stained everywhere with drink and oil, tobacco juice and grease. He looked deeply into the once blue eyes and tried to recognize in them the old spotless soul of dear old Tony Okehampton. During this painful hour and a half he just said yes and no and ha! ha! and tried not to listen to the kaleidoscopic, indeterminate, unsteady sentences. In endeavoring to put his old friend up to date this God-stricken creature began and never finished a hundred reasons for his moral and financial debacle. He gathered first that it was due to Okehampton's wife, then to his children, then to a most persisent ill luck, a sort of jetta, which, like the Old Man of the Sea, had fastened itself upon his back. He could not make head or tail of any of these laughing, blubbering, bitter and wholly unconvincing reasons. The one thing that stood out of them all was that Okehampton himself was unoffending. Nothing was his fault. There was not one thing honest about this once spotlessly honest man. He had soaked the truth in beer and stained it with tobacco. There was nothing at the bottom of the well except dregs.

All this gave Thoresby a very peculiar sensation. He felt like a man who had once been a devout Roman Catholic and who, on entering his church again after a series of faithless years, found it desecrated by the hand of some satirical devil who had brought blasphemy to a fine art and had painted a leer upon the face of the Virgin Mary. Disappointment was a word

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which had no meaning to him. He was brought almost to the verge of physical illness. He felt older and shriveled. He knew wasters backward. He knew himself inside out. He had instinctively herded with every class and species of the genus. He found Tony Okehampton, dear old Tony Okehampton, the biggest waster of them all.

If this man had left his wife alone, if he had not spent himself upon the most inventive ribaldry and picturesque indelicacy whenever his wife's name came into his racing mill-stream of incoherence, it might have been better. If he had been able to speak of his two girls with a clean mouth, it would not have been so bad. As it was, the more eagerly and tearfully he endeavored to justify himself, the more he stood condemned out of his own mouth.

The new Lord Thoresby was infinitely glad when at last Tony Okehampton faltered, broke off and fell into a stertorous sleep with his head buried in his chest. He got up and stretched himself and said something beneath his breath in which the name of Almighty God came reverently for the first time for who knows how many years. He saw with renewed feelings of pain that his old friend's very room had passed through the same debasement as its owner. All the pictures, and they were good, were cock-eyed. Many of them had been used as targets for darts. The very books looked like bedraggled street-walkers. Their covers were torn, their pages dog-eared. Dust sat thickly upon everything. Sporting guns, fishing rods, a banjo with one string broken, boxing gloves, dumb-

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bells, empty tobacco tins rubbed shoulders with broken bottles, dirty tumblers, inkpots, broken braces, golf shoes all over dried mud, and an endless collection of rubbish. No orderly hand had been laid upon anything for years. It seemed to Thoresby that the very windows had not been opened for an age. The room was not merely fuggy. It was piled high with layers of fugginess.

He left the place on tiptoe quickly. He wanted to breathe. He stood in the middle of the hall and heard something moving in the gallery. He wheeled around with a sort of fear upon him and saw something slither out of sight—not, however, before he was aware that the figure was that of an untidy woman, barely dressed. A little giggle hung upon the air—a snigger, rather.

“My God!” said Thoresby.

For the second time that morning he hurried out into the sunlight to get warm, to feel the touch of health. He stood on the moss-covered path at a loose end. He was a hostless guest.

Years before he had slept in a room in the left wing of the building, what was called the bachelor wing. It contained a charming breakfast room hung around with antlers and sporting trophies. It had its own main door leading onto the terrace, its own staircase running up to a set of smallish, cheery bedrooms. It was in this building that he had passed the last night of his last visit, with Tony Okehampton’s generous check under his pillow. He had placed it there with a laugh as superstitious girls hide love letters.



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A porter, treading warily, one eye on the lookout for an unchained dog and the other for the master, came up carrying his shirt case and kit bag. Thoresby shrugged his shoulders. "Better bring 'em here," he said and led the way to the wing he remembered with more than a touch of sentiment.

The door was open. The antlers still hung on the walls, but the room had been used as a sort of toolshed and there were hundreds of empty and broken pots, some of them filled with powdered earth and the remains of withered plants. The old oak table, worth a good deal to a collector, had been made into a carpenter's bench. A winch had been screwed onto it and it was covered with rusty nails, odd bits of iron, a chopper or two, a plane and several screws. Thoresby could have wept. Had nothing been spared, not even furniture? Had this diabolical jetta played havoc with everything? He turned sharply upon the gaping man, gave him half a crown and packed him off. It seemed almost indecent to let him into these secrets. He then picked up his luggage and carried it upstairs. The stair carpets were in holes. Someone had drawn obscene things upon the walls. The floor of the passage was indescribably dirty. Thoresby hurried along to his old room. He found it much the same, except that even there the spirit of ugliness had entered. The bed was unmade. A blanket and a pillow lay upon the floor. The sheets were all trowsled, the pictures awry, the looking-glass starred as though it had been deliberately smashed by a stone. But the window was open and that was something.

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The Earl of Thoresby made his bed, not for the first time. He would have to be content to lie upon it. And while he worked he became aware of curious sounds. They grew in volume. At first he thought that someone must be ill-treating a horse. Then it seemed to him that a drunken groom was assaulting a woman. He heard unbelievable words, ingeniously blasphemous. He felt impelled to go to the window, to cry out and put a stop to it. And there he stood rooted, looking at a scene which had never met his world-traveled eyes.

He saw two young girls, both beautiful, with faces distorted, their supple figures in short skirts and tight-fitting jerseys, eyeing each other like wild beasts. Both were crouching as though ready to spring and both were breathing hard after a bout of fighting. A little trickle of blood ran down the pale cheek of the girl whose hair was all golden and curly.

Before he could cry out, the one whose face was swarthy like an Italian's, and whose hair was black, sprang forward. Her dirty hands clutched the golden locks and tore them wildly. There was a shriek of pain, a running fracas, bursts of rage and invective.

And then Thoresby left the window and the room and the wing. He ran around the building like a man who wishes to put a stop to murder. He found the fair-haired girl full stretch upon the paving stones, with the dark one kneeling on her chest with a frothy mouth.

All he could say was "Oh!—Oh!"

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The conqueror looked up insolently. "Who are you?" she said.

Thoresby bent over her, put his hands under her arms and wrenched her away. The girl stood for a moment in utter astonishment, burst into a shrill shriek of laughter and fled.

And then Thoresby gave his hand to the prostrate girl. She took it and stood on her feet and faced him. Her beauty startled him. She might have sat to a sculptor as the embodiment of exquisite youth.

"I'm—sorry!" said Thoresby.

"Yes, and you're trespassing."

And then Thoresby was alone again in this God-forgotten place.

## CHAPTER V

**T**HE sulky, slatternly woman entered Billy's room with hot water in a copper can. At the same time she handed him a telegram.

"'E sez this is fer you." She laughed a little. "A nice change for us to 'ave a lord 'ere. Shall 'ave to polish up the 'andle of the big front door. Whoo!" She broke into one or two sloppy dance steps and a wisp of hair dangled about her shoulders.

The telegram was not of much importance. The solicitors asked to be informed of his lordship's future movements. "No answer," said Thoresby.

"Reely!—'Ere, did you win or lose? We ain't spotted a winner in this 'ouse—well, I dunno. It's a long time. Anything I can do fer you?" She went as she spoke to the looking-glass and smudged it over with her apron.

"Nothing else, thank you."

"Easily pleased," she said and threw up her chin. But she did not go straight to the door. She flapped and flicked here and there, stooping to pick up pronounced pieces of fluff and finally stopping in front of the bed, at which she gazed in amazement.

"Well, strike me," she said, "that's funny."

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"Um!"

"Oo made that bed? Must ha' bin the fairies."

"No, it was me," said Thoresby.

The look of astonishment broadened. "My word," she said. "I didn't know as 'ow lords was useful with their 'ands. You'll find lots to do 'ere if you're like that."

She went out and slammed the door, went several paces along the passage with floppy heels, returned, opened the door and shut it very quietly. It was her first concession to law and order for a considerable time.

Thoresby laughed. The effort hurt him. He noticed that he felt almost painfully hungry. No luncheon had made its appearance and no tea. He had wandered about for hours alone. There had been no sign of life in the house or out of it. The stables were empty and so were the kennels. Stinging nettles grew everywhere, on the top of old walls, through the chinks in the paving stones, everywhere, and for companions they had dandelions, exuberantly green.

Once, as he stood miserably alone and looked out at the panorama of sky across which black clouds were unrolling, he felt a sudden irresistible desire to go, to get back to London, to make one of all its thousands, to see things moving quickly and moving with noise. The appalling stillness, the hideous decay of the place got on his nerves. Then he remembered that he was more or less without friends, that it was necessary for him to get free board and lodging until

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his solicitors produced something tangible. And then the curious fun of the thing struck him—a waster in a wasted place. There was something right about it all.

He was putting the stud into his dress shirt when his door was flung open boisterously. Tony Okehampton appeared, wrapped in an amazingly filthy dressing-gown without a rope. He had obviously just emerged from a cold bath. His curly fair hair was wet and his cheeks were stung into a sort of healthiness. There was a good deal of the old Tony Okehampton about him. "My dear old boy," he cried, "you must think me infernally remiss! I ought to have told you at once how sincerely I deplore your great loss. To lose one's father—by Jove!" He laid his hand on Billy's shoulders. He was very much in earnest.

"Thanks, Tony."

"At the same time, old boy, hearty congratulations. It's a dashed useful thing to be a peer even in these days. I suppose you're a very warm man now, eh? What is it, six houses, isn't it, and a matter of five to seven thousand a year? How about a hundred on account, old chap?" He roared with laughter to gild the pill. "Oh, look here, I tell you what. I'll toss you double or quits, sudden death."

As Billy got into his shirt he put his friend in possession of a few salient facts in the fewest and best chosen words of his inimitable dictionary in which such phrases as "broke to the bally wide" came in more than once.

Whereupon Tony Okehampton let out a mighty guf-

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faw. "By God," he said, "this gives me a healthier feeling. There's nothing to get out of you, old boy, so we can treat each other fairly and squarely. No finesse, you know, or any of that damn rot. Man to man and so forth—dash my buttons, what do I see you doing? Getting into evening clothes, *here*. All right. Yes. Excellent notion! Let's be little swells again. Let's put on our best bibs and tuckers and be English landed gentry. Anything for a change. I'll dash out and tip the wink to the others. I've got about thirty suits of dress clothes somewhere or other. With a bit of faking I daresay they'll look presentable. It'll be like sticking on fancy dress."

He left the room excitedly, boisterously, and as he went down the passage he broke into a song, an old song of the Albert period, "Champagne Charlie is my name——"

Lord Thoresby looked at himself in the starred glass. A peculiarly sour grin was on his face. "Well, Gee!" he said. "There it is. It's life. Only the angels die young. I daresay I shall be able to put in a fairly amusin' time."

He went down looking more horsy than ever in a dinner jacket and very tube-like trousers, scrupulously pressed. His black hair was brushed straight back without a parting. No seal's back was smoother or glossier. There wasn't a gray hair to be seen. Men who live by their wits become gray much later in life than earnest, unimaginative persons.

Like most Micawbers, his most valuable stock in trade was an incurable power of quick recovery. He

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was now quite prepared to accept the new Tony Okehampton. Crying over spilt milk was a hobby in which he never indulged. Life was short and could only be lived once. Death was an endless business.

He made his way into the hall in excellent spirits with a lively appetite. He saw at once that some attempt had been made to clean the place up. The corsets had disappeared. Much of the dust had been flapped away and the rugs were straight.

Thoresby started a cigarette. He was evidently himself again and that was something. He now rather liked the arrant bohemianism of this place.

The sound of high heels on the stairs caught his ears. He saw a woman who might have been the leader of a post-impressionist set coming down. Her pale, clever face was thickly powdered and her red, thick mat of hair, streaked with gray, was arranged in studious disarrangement. Her black bodice was daringly cut, and a long, black, soft train pattered behind her. She looked rather like a French actress or a hostess of the official Radical party. She was very tall and her head was noticeably big. There was a distinct air about her, and the angle of her head was precocious and self-conscious. She came forward with outstretched hand. "Beautiful weather for the ducks—I *don't* think!" she said. "Welcome, my dear lord. Welcome to an effete country in which King Anarchy reigns supreme."

"Thanks so much," said Thoresby. His healthiness, his shortness of hair seemed amazingly out of place and banal.



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"And so you're Billy Russon, Captain of Les Rastaqueuères. *L'homme s'amuse.*"

Thoresby showed his white teeth. He looked rather like a well-bred terrier under the pressure of a sympathetic hand.

"You must meet my gels."

"I have," said Billy, and laughed. It astonished him a little to think how seriously he had taken their gymnastic exercises.

"I think that you will find them somewhat out of the common, although I say it as shouldn't. Our children owe more than people think to heredity and environment."

"Quite," said Billy. "It's most kind of you to put me up, Mrs. Tony."

"To whom should the old door of the Okehamptons open if not to you? *Bon chien chasse de race.* Would you please ring the bell?"

Thoresby did so.

Presently their conversation was disturbed by the nervous approach of a cross-eyed girl who flipped her fingers nervously and shot her joints. Black stockings with great holes at the heels hung loosely over her shoes. She was built on big lines and wore no stays. There was something Shakespearean about her. She might have been handmaiden to Falstaff. It seemed useless for her to endeavor to focus anything and so she looked both ways.

"Now, Emily, attend to me carefully. Whatever your mother may say or whatever may be the duties on which you are at present occupied, I wish you to

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go over the fields to King's Redesborough at once, obtain and pay for a bottle of my—usual medicine. Have you got any money?"

A slow smile stole over the great face. "No'm."

Mrs. Tony turned to Billy. "Lend me seven and sixpence, will you?" she said.

"I—I'll just see if——"

Thoresby did not bring out all the money that was in his pocket. He thought it would create a bad precedent. He sorted out three half crowns from the change for a five pound note and put them in Mrs. Okehampton's much-lined and not too steady palm.

"Many thanks," she said. "Make no mistake about this, Emily."

"No'm."

As soon as the girl had shuffled away Mrs. Tony turned with a smile to her new and convenient friend. "I'm what is erroneously called a morphia maniac," she said. "Okehampton has his beer, you your whisky, I my morphia, the cows their grass, the rabbits their succulent weeds, and the angels their incense. Life needs its compensations."

Someone stood at Thoresby's elbow.

"Darling," said Mrs. Tony, "this is our old friend Lord Thoresby. Billy, my eldest daughter, christened Lavender by a sentimental male parent, but commonly known as Dick."

"Because I ought to have been a boy," said Dick.

Ought to have been a boy! This delicious and charming creature whose golden hair brought light into the old hall and whose large gray eyes would

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draw to them a small army of eager and hungry men.

Billy drew in his breath. He did not recognize in this sedate and almost prim angel the wild-cat who had shrieked beneath his window.

"Where's Harry?" asked Mrs. Tony.

"Here," said a voice.

Down the stairs came the other little animal, no longer with blood upon her dark face, no longer with loose strands of black hair, no longer compressed into a tight-fitting jersey which showed her budding figure. She was now, like her sister, an Okehampton, a dark-eyed little lady with a curious half smile playing around her full lips.

"Harry, darling! Come and be presented to the aristocracy."

And then Tony charged down upon them in all the glory of evening clothes. His collar was of an ancient period and his shirt far from pristine. His jacket had obviously been worn while grooming a horse. Short stiff hairs stuck to it. His trousers belonged to another suit and had been used for carpentry. But the man inside these clothes was the old Tony Okehampton, sunny and gay and debonair.

"Dinner is served," said the bedraggled woman, wiping her hands on her dirty apron.

A strong smell of boiled rabbit came into the hall.

Tony laughed, a huge laugh. "We shoot our own dinners nowadays, Billy," he said. "The butchers have struck."

## CHAPTER VI

**W**HEN Thoresby went up to bed that night—got away, as he inwardly put it—he took with him a mass of confused impressions. His mind retained pictures of a young, half formed, dark and sensual girl sitting in a high backed Jacobean chair very quietly, very silently making eyes at him like any Budapesth dancing girl; of another as young, but for a year, of so different a type as almost to be unrelated, crunched up in the corner of a big settee buried in the pages of Kim, one foot tucked under her, a look on her face of ecstatic concentration. The pictures he had in his mind of his host were moving pictures, because the man was hardly still for a moment. His delight at having under his roof someone who was neither a yokel, sycophantic for beer, nor a bounder from the town who became familiar, made Tony almost boyish. A bottle of whisky bought with money borrowed from his guest—Thoresby's small funds were becoming rapidly depleted—unlocked the rusty hinges of his memory. With immense gusto, with the vividness of a Frenchman, he went back over the old days, revived old names and old deeds, walked again over old spots, repeated old jokes and acted old

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scenes. The hall rang with laughter and echoed with the excited footsteps of the man who found it temperamentally impossible to remain in one chair for longer than a moment. These were very pleasant pictures until the central figure gradually became soaked and sodden, foul-mouthed and unspeakably coarse. But the pictures which would not easily be rubbed out of his brain were those of the woman with the heavily powdered face and eyes, which became almost supernaturally bright under the effects of a new dose of morphia. He had watched her during dinner—the so-called dinner—fall gradually into a dull and torpid condition, broken by sudden fits of shivering and jerkiness and irritability. He had watched her revive after the meal like an apparently dead log fire energetically blown up with bellows. She, too, had a sort of flair and talked brilliantly and epigrammatically, quoting innumerable books of which ordinary women know and ought to know nothing, bursting into French and Italian and touches of Spanish, and finally, when at the top of her unnatural form, taking the center of the stage and all the limelight—to Tony's ill-suppressed annoyance and Harry's sneering amusement—and reciting the pretended hunchback's speech about the wind from "*Les Buffons*" in perfectly pronounced French. It was a *tour de force*, a most artistic thing, proving the woman to be possessed of great talent and a fine memory. Flattered by Thoresby's genuine admiration, she gave an inimitable imitation of Sarah Bernhardt in "*Frou-Frou*" and of Yvette Guilbert singing "*Les Cloches de Nantes*." It was vastly en-

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tertaining and a little pitiful. And then, as the effects of the drug worked off, she fell away and eyed Tony venomously, pricking and stabbing him with the most outrageous sarcasm, finally becoming dull-eyed and hard-mouthed and noisily silent.

Thoresby sat on his bed for some time thinking these things out, wondering speculatively, now entirely without emotion, how soon after Tony's marriage the jetta settled upon him and his. It was half past twelve before he got up. His window was open and the draught had made his one candle gutter. The bed was untempting, the room full of evil spirits. But the man who had been glad enough to shake down in doss-houses in the slums of New York and stretch himself out on the burned grass of the prairie gave no thought to these things. A great silence had fallen upon the house.

He was just going to take off his coat when his door opened cautiously and the two girls came in with their eyes dancing with mischief.

"Gee!" he said with his little affected touch of Americanism. "I thought you kids were in bed ages ago."

"Bed be hanged!" said Dick. "We never go to bed."

"Never go to bed?"

"Not much. The best part of the day's the night. We join the fairies over the cross and see things that no one else dreams about."

"Oh," said Harry, "we just camp out because it's better than nothing, and going to bed like a silly fool

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citizen bores us up to the neck. Tip us a decent cigarette, cockie."

"Meaning me?" asked Thoresby.

"Why not?" laughed Harry, slipping her arm through his. "Come on now. Buck up! You look as though you smoked something decent in the way of Egyptians, drugged for choice."

"Well, don't smoke 'em here," said Dick. "Come on the hill with us and listen to the stars. Will you, lord?"

Thoresby was under the impression for the moment that they were pulling his leg. "Is this a genuine invitation?" he said. "Are you really going out on this hill of yours at this time of night?"

"Well," said Dick, "we're not born harpists. We only twang the instrument when it pays us and then we're experts. Shove on a hat. Never mind about a coat and come and be taught how to spend the night. See the day break and hear the winds wake up and feel the dew on your hair."

"All right," said Thoresby.

"Bully for you," said Harry, and made a rush at his shirt case. "Where are these much-talked-of cigarettes of yours?" She flung out his clothes recklessly and pitched his collars about and tossed a comb into the fireplace.

"Go easy!" said Thoresby. "Go easy!"

She pounced upon a box of cigarettes with a chuckle of delight. "Come and watch me smoke fifty of these," she said, "while you wait." She smacked her lips. "Oh, this is great!"

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Thoresby began to feel that he was back again among cowboys. He picked up his cap and made a move toward the door. Harry seized him around the neck and kissed him on the face. "You're a bally acquisition," she said.

"Tiptoes!" whispered Dick. "We don't want old Tony to hear us. He'd put his head out of the window and shout like a brickee."

And so, rather like a school-boy breaking out of bounds, Billy obeyed orders, followed the experts softly along the passage. He gathered that their father slept in the bachelor wing, and made his way with them out into the night.

The moon was high and almost full. Everything was outlined with silver. The stars almost made him giddy, they seemed to be so near and there were so many of them. There was hardly a suggestion of wind and nothing moved. The two girls danced like spirits in front of him. The moonbeams on Dick's golden hair seemed to light the way. They made their way across the gardens, tramping carelessly over beds and kicking everything from the sheer love of life. Then they went through a gate in the wall and up a steep and narrow path glistening with pieces of chalk and soft with dead leaves. At first it was bordered with the wall on the left and a great hedge on the right and almost roofed in with the heavily leaved branches of trees. And then it opened out to a hill which ran up alongside the beech forest, among whose countless branches there was not a single whisper. Thoresby was puffing for breath before he joined the



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two slight figures at the top, which were silhouetted against the gleaming sky.

"How much further?" he asked.

"Ten yards," said Dick.

"Half a mile," said Harry, and on they went again in front of him, dancing, with their arms waving above their heads like demented Russians, self-made Pavlovas. Every moment Thoresby expected them to be joined by a filmy army of dryads and wood nymphs. He was not so young as he used to be and consequently a little stiff in the joints and he was not a little glad to find himself at the top of the hill.

His peculiar companions were not to be seen. Thoresby grinned. "By Jove!" he thought. "They've tricked me. This is one of their little jokes. They've dragged me up here to lose me."

And then a voice said: "Oh, come on, cockie! Come on," and he saw a hand waving. He went forward onto the very lip of the hill, stood giddily there and became aware of the fact that the two girls were squatting over an unlighted fire of sticks in a chalky dip, a sort of little landslide. He climbed down cautiously, trying to keep his clothes clean, and sat on a boulder of grass.

Stretched out below and running up in the distance to the sky was a huge stretch of country, a patchwork of meadow land and cultivated fields divided into squares and oblongs by black lines of hedges and trees. Here and there the moon showed him the roofs of villages, under some of which sparkled little lights. Far away the starry sky seemed to fall upon a fringe

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of trees. He felt as though he were sitting in the middle of a great ball exquisitely painted and full of air. He held onto the boulder to keep himself from sliding down. He wanted to laugh and quote poetry. It seemed to him for a moment that his checkered years had never happened. He, too, was just a sort of thing, half human, half bird, that had come out of a hole or a nest to chirp and chatter.

The two girls wrangled shrilly as to whether they should light a fire. Their voices struck a discordant note. It was settled that a fire should not be lighted and another silence came. Even these two astonishing creatures who had never had a chance and to whom this God-beloved spot was dreadfully familiar were made dumb by the beauty of the night. It was very warm. Hot air seemed to be rising from the valley. The moon was directly over their heads, and when Dick flung herself full stretch it showed up even the grayness of her eyes.

Billy Thoresby felt ridiculously emotional, like a man, who, years after she is dead, hears a hymn that his mother used to sing. He felt that after all his rolling years, England was at his feet; the old country, home. He let his eyes feast slowly over the wide panorama. One by one the winking lights went out as he looked. They had seemed to him to be the eyes of friendly fairies, resting on him kindly. He looked into the wood which ran down into a hollow at his left. He could only see the tops of the trees. They were divided by a road running up the other side of the hill. It looked like a nigger's head parted in the

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center. He must have sat watching and listening for an hour, utterly forgetful of the presence of the two girls. It was then that Harry crawled up to him and nestled closely and put her head on his shoulder. Her dark eyes glinted like stars. She was very warm.

"Dick's asleep," she said under her voice. "I want to speak to you."

"Oh," said Billy, and cleared his throat, "all right." How old was this child?

"I knew you'd come. I've dreamed about this. I swear I have, night after night."

"How weird!" said Billy. He was just a little uncomfortable. The girl might have been his wife.

"No, it isn't. My dreams always come true. I'm—I forget the word, but there is one. Dick calls it cranky, mother imaginative, and Tony ruddy nonsense. You know Tony! He's an absolute British working-man, except that he's a poacher and a wrong 'un to his boots. But don't let's talk about unpleasant things. Let's talk about *you*."

Billy laughed a little. This was ingenuousness run mad. His hand was caught up and pressed to a round, firm cheek and the girl wriggled a little closer.

"You're going to do something for me," she said, "the one big thing that I've longed for. That's why I cried so fearfully for having been caught fighting by you." She kissed his hand several times fiercely. "You're going to take me out of this to London and wherever you go."

"My good kid," said Billy, "what in the world are you talkin' about?"



“‘I’m telling you,’ she said, ‘it’s got to be. I dreamed it.’”



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She scrambled up onto her knees and faced him, putting her arms around his neck. "I'm telling you," she said, "it's got to be. I dreamed it. I'm going away with you out of all this. You're going to give me clothes to wear and scent and very thin shoes with high heels and money to have my hair curled properly. You are! You are!" She bent forward suddenly and kissed him on the lips and all her young body lay against him.

For a moment Billy was carried away. The apparent fatality of the thing, which seemed to her to be so cut and dried, made words impossible. For a moment his breath came quickly and his heart beat heavily. In her present mood this girl was very soft and tender and exquisitely young and Billy was a past master in the art of enjoying everything that came his way. Then he thought of Tony, his old friend, and he held the girl away from him by main force.

"Now, now," he said, "now, now. I'm old enough to be your father and all that sort of thing and I've come to see the view."

And then the girl burst out into a torrent of words, in which he was told that she meant to go with him, that he had been sent to take her away, to lift her out of the immoral bog in which she was living, to give her a chance. She didn't care whether he liked her. He had just *got* to take her. She wouldn't be any trouble. All she needed he could let her have easily enough; clothes and stockings and shoes and cigarettes and nice smelling stuff to put in her bath, a maid to

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dress her, and excitement. She repeated the last word over and over again. Excitement! Excitement! She'd pay for it, all right. Oh, Lord, yes, and it was perfectly idiotic of him to look shocked and silly. He didn't suppose, did he, that she was a simpering little school miss, after living under the same roof with Tony and her mother, and meeting the only people who came near them, who got drunk and talked before her as they talked before men?

She forced his hands away. She was as strong as a little lioness, and laid her face against his. "Be good!" she said. "Be good! Play the game. Be a sport! Mother told me that you were a champion waster, so it's not a bit of good putting on frills. You're just the man for me. I shall only do something worse and bolt with the ticket collector at the station or some such bounder. I tell you I'm going away from here and someone's got to take me, and you're the one! I tell you, I've dreamed it."

It was a very peculiar position to be in. Here was a child with the mind of a woman—a sort of a woman—absolutely primeval in her insistence toward the gratification of an overwhelming desire, with no more self-respect or sense of right or wrong than a bacchante.

"But, my good child," he said, "I can't take you away. It's impossible. I'm broke to the wide. I can't even keep myself. I haven't a bob to jingle in my pocket. Besides, hang it, I'm not a baby stealer! And then there's your father. Great Scott!—Look here now, just simmer down and talk sense. It's the

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moonlight." He laughed and got up and stretched himself.

It was no use. The girl flung herself at him and broke into another and even more incoherent appeal and demand, ordering, imploring, cajoling, tempting. The man had never experienced anything like it. It disturbed him. He shouted out: "Stop it!" and the girl went down in a heap and burst into an amazing fit of weeping.

Thoresby looked about and expected the woods to empty themselves of indignant people who would ask him what he had done, what cruelty he had performed. He expected to hear windows open in the houses far away in the valley and hear startled birds flying from branch to branch. As it was, Dick woke up and jumped up and marched up to him with her fists clenched and asked what he had been doing to her sister. She stood there like an imperious young princess, like a loyal boy, like the sweetest girl he had ever seen, with the silver light on her oval face and her golden hair sparkling. He felt that if he were to tell *this* child exactly what her sister had said some unseen hand would cut out his tongue. There were oaths upon her lips but purity in her eyes.

He just said nothing and shrugged his shoulders and Dick went down beside her sister and wrapped her in her arms. "Harry! Hal! Poor old duck! What's he done? What's he said to you? I'll kill him if you like. I'll jump on his face." Other things she said, showing her great love for the girl with



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whom she fought, and then she was thrust aside forcibly.

"Oh, stow it!" said Harry, shifting her shoulders and sitting on her heels for a minute, with her face all shiny. "He didn't say anything. It's not his fault. I suppose I can cry if I like, can't I? You haven't bought the bally earth!"

She got up, turned on her heel and ran like a hare. At the top of the hill she stopped and turned around and broke into a sort of dance, cut blackly against the sky, and a trickle of laughter came into the air, and then she disappeared.

Thoresby breathed more freely. The whole thing was like an exhibition of madness on the part of a wood nymph who had found neat whisky in the heart of the wild flowers instead of dew. It was all very eerie and rather unpleasant.

"Just like Harry!" said Dick.

"Rather a weird kid, isn't she?"

"No, at least not more than most. That is, yes. She is a bit. She sees things and hears things and makes up things. She's really awfully clever. If she had a chance, I believe she'd be a great actress. If she likes, she makes me laugh and cry. Where are you going?"

"Anywhere. I thought of going home to bed. I feel like being ordinary and commonplace."

"Oh, no. That's piffle. Don't go. Let's stay and see the sun rise. Come back to the old spot. It'll be a corker this morning."

They went back together. Dick sat down like an

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elf upon a toadstool hugging her knees. She undid her hair and let it all spill over her shoulders. A man would have had to be a brute who could have laid a hand upon her. And while they waited she talked, she gabbled, all about herself, her thoughts, and her interpretation of life and death and what she thought of God, and what she meant to do and be. She told him what the woods meant and how the hills came there, and all her ideas were fragrant and very sweet. She said that she was going to make heaps of money and take her father and mother to London. They'd have to go straight there, because there'd be so many people to see them if they didn't. Father was one of the best really, only he'd always had such bad luck, and mother was a genius. And she would build a little house, all windows, just where they were sitting, and escape sometimes with Harry. And, all the while she babbled on, Nature was preparing her *coup de théâtre*. The silver melted and seemed to sink wetly into the earth. An unseen hand rubbed the long line of horizon, leaving it all hazy like charcoal under a big thumb. And then at last there was a touch of gold which spread like liquid, and the birds sang, a blackbird nearby piping throatily. And, gradually, a new vague light crept up, altering the colors, bringing out hitherto unseen things, even changing the whole nature of the climate. A little coldish wind touched their cheeks and stirred the girl's hair. With the approach of day shadows ran away and sanity entered the woods. It was unforgettable.

It all happened in silence so far as the two people

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were concerned. They sat on, watchful until the sky was split and great slashes of color came through.

Thoresby said: "Thanks. That was great."

Dick laughed. "Yes. I worked that well, didn't I? Topping bit of stage management. I hope you'll tip my men. A very useful lot of stage hands and scene shifters, what?"

With daylight the girl had become self-conscious and would-be funny. It didn't suit her. She was an echo of Tony.

They got up simultaneously and moved slowly back up the hill and down it, all among the crinkling leaves of last year. Under the hedge at the bottom they saw a girl lying on her right side with her cheek pressed to her right arm, which was outstretched, and her knees bent double under her. She was in an orgy of sleep, with her lips slightly parted and her long black lashes etched on her pale face.

"Good Lord!" said Thoresby. "It's——"

"Harry!" said Dick. "Don't wake her."

"Why not?"

"She'd only hurl something at us. She's always rather quaint when she wakes up. Let's go and pinch some eggs from that poultry run down there. They're really rather succulent, neat, out of the shell."

## CHAPTER VII

**A**LTHOUGH there was very little else to eat at Quennor than rabbits and eggs, nothing to drink except beer and water, no soap in the bathroom, a torn cloth on the billiard table, and an atmosphere charged with complete degeneracy, Thoresby made no effort to escape. On the contrary, he found himself day after day more and more interested, although less and less entertained. It was not because Tony pulled himself together. After the first evening the pleasure and excitement of seeing a new and civilized face went off and Tony went his own way again, shambling through his days in continual drunkenness, and in continual association with the wasters of the village. He frequently came home merely to sleep. Often he was brought home either shouting and singing, or with legs, which were like pieces of rope, dangling in the wind.

There was nothing to be had of Mrs. Tony's company. Sometimes she was to be met flitting uneasily about the passages with an ingenious lack of clothing, talking to herself, and laughing loudly or wailing like a soul in torture. If Tony happened to be in the hall, he pitched things at her—the first things that came to his hand—and taunted her coarsely, but always the

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dead white face would come forward and one or two sentences of vitriolic sarcasm would be left behind which would stir Tony into impotent frenzy. Often murder would be stopped by the two girls, who would hold their father back by main force, cursing him.

Thoresby saw very little of the girls themselves. They always seemed to be in the throes of some secret expedition. They disappeared for days together, going out with sporting rifle and coming back with very mixed bags. It seemed to him that they were expert poachers. In any case, it was entirely owing to their efforts that there was anything to eat in the house.

Thoresby's one good point, apart from an unconquerable optimism and a settled good temper, was that he never lied to himself. He faced things squarely and owned up. Wherefore he told himself that he remained at Quennor, in the mad, degenerate, uneasy atmosphere of Quennor, merely for one reason. He was fascinated by Dick. He was as much in love with her as he would have been if he had been a beardless boy, and he knew, also, that Harry aroused all his sensualism. Then, too, he was living rent free and that was something. He was like a man who marked time, who found himself in a sort of creek that was undisturbed by the great currents of the sea. He was quietly waiting while his solicitors worked. Of course, he could have obtained credit in London on the strength of his title, and there were a hundred dodges at his disposal by which he could have provided himself with ready cash. But he was

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possessed with a sufficient Gilbertianism to become respectable under his new name. He went for long lonely walks, discovering quaint villages, lunching frugally at wayside inns, becoming friends with village children and dogs, always hoping to find Dick somewhere and always avoiding Harry. He knew very well that he had only to consent to take her away to be her master.

The weather was gorgeous. Hot day succeeded hot day. The country lay under the spell of persistent sun and tropical skies.

He had been in this place a little over a fortnight when a thing happened for which he had been waiting. Tony followed him one morning and sat down on the burned grass above the cross on the hill. He cadged some tobacco and loaded a dilapidated pipe with shaky fingers. He had never seen a man with eyes so bloodshot. There was a week's growth upon his chin. There were patches of white among the golden stubble.

"I'm getting to love this view," said Billy.

"Curse the place!" cried Tony.

"If these woods were mine, I'd starve rather than cut down a tree."

"If they were *mine*, there shouldn't be a ruddy tree left standing."

"Aren't they yours?"

"Mine? God, no! They're all mine, but not a damn branch belongs to me. There's not a stone, nor a twig, not a bit of chalk, nor a blade of grass, not a haystack, not an uncut hedge on all my property

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that has belonged to me for years. It's all mortgaged up to the chimneys."

"Oh, I see," said Billy quietly.

The other man sneered. "Oh, you see, do you? Clever little man! What a brain! Look here, Billy, it comes to this. Years ago I put you on your feet. In my delightful, large-handed way I dashed you a check for five hundred of the best, which got you out of the country. I've been able, somehow or other, with the help of a firm of fishy solicitors, to pay the interest to the mortgages and so prevent their foreclosing, which is, of course, precisely what they want to do. This year that's absolutely impossible, and if on Friday next I can't produce a matter of three thousand quid, I'm outed, lock, stock, barrel and bung."

"Gee!" said Billy.

Tony began to talk more loudly and use his hands characteristically. "God alive, man!" he said, "ain't you going to do something? Here you are living on the fat of the land, with the run of my place, in my debt for a matter of five hundred and interest for twenty-three years at five per cent.—and no Jew's interest either—and all you can say—and I tell you I'm on the lip of Hell—is Gee! God's truth, that's friendship."

"But, my dear old man, what can I do? I haven't got a bean, and, even if I could raise the five hundred, it 'ud only be a drop."

Tony began to blubber. "Think of me and my wife and little ones, with no roof, tramping the country like gypsies, singing outside pubs, Okehamptons the

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lot of us, and all because I've been a generous damned fool, open as the day to melting charity. That's what it comes to, I tell you. On Friday next there'll be a procession of dirty little Jew stinkers on my doorsteps and out I shall go with a delicate wife and two beautiful, fine gels. Are you going to stand by and see that done? You, a peer of England? It would be a dirty shame. I've been your best pal. For God's sake do something. Pawn yourself. Use your wits. They're keen enough! Tide me over. That's all I ask you to do, tide me over. I'll pull myself together, I swear I will. I'll chuck the drink and get a job as an agent or something. I'll start writing and make a fortune. I *can* write. I'm a very gifted feller. Don't you remember those parodies in *The Isis*? I gave *you* a chance. Give *me* a chance?"

What could Thoresby say? He pressed his hands tightly together. A dozen futile ideas came into his brain. "It's impossible," he said. "I'm helpless. The Governor, knowing me, settled all the ready money there was on my brother. Apart from a house or two and a collection of pictures, I've got nothing. Under the present condition of affairs houses are a drug on the market and the only way to get rid of pictures is to present 'em to galleries." He put his hand in his pocket and brought out a sovereign, three two-shilling pieces, a sixpence and four pennies. "Look, that's me. That's the full strength of my banking account."

Tony reached forward and took the lot. He hadn't seen so much money for a considerable time. "Well,



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then, come and have a drink," he said. "But we shall have to walk eight miles to get it, because all the pubs have got bills against me 'round here. Or, I'll tell you what. Here's four and six. Go down to the White Cat in the village and buy a bottle of whisky. We'll do it in up here. Don't let anybody see you've got it, especially Drusilla. The missus hasn't been able to get her damned morphia for four days and she's rabid. She's fallen back on drinking gun oil. Go on! Do a sprint. I've got a thirst on me I wouldn't sell for a fiver."

Thoresby handed back the money and shook his head.

Tony took it and with a burst of rage threw it away, breaking into an insane and hideous tirade, in the course of which he consigned his friend to every sort of hell.

At the end of it, when the man was hoarse and doddering, Thoresby got up and left the place, followed by oaths and curses. He looked back on the turn of the hill and saw Tony Okehampton on his hands and knees, hunting like a hog for the pieces of silver.

## CHAPTER VIII

**T**HE night before the fateful Friday found this strange household in a riotous frame of mind.

Tony had fallen in with one of those undergraduates who had not yet acquired the faculty of saying no. This youth was bicycling from a neighboring village to the golf course on the other side of the Chilterns. He had taken a wrong turning and had just jumped off to consult a home-made map roughly drawn by his host when Tony, quick to appreciate the position, gave him a view hallo! and bore down upon him much in the same way as a pirate used to fasten upon an unarmed trading vessel.

Tony had shaved. It was a stroke of luck. He had also by some strange chance changed his suit for the first time for several months. He made a fine figure of a man as he came down the road with a smile of immense good nature upon his face. "What's the trouble, sir?" he sang out. "Can I be of any assistance?"

"It's all right, thanks—only that I've got off the line somehow. I'm trying to find the golf course."

"Ah!" said Tony. "A lot of men turn up here. As the Squire of this place it's my privilege to put

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them right." He congratulated himself on having worked that in rather well. He was going to move Heaven and earth to earn a drink.

The youth was impressed. What wouldn't he have given the Squire of such a country?—he himself being the son of a cotton spinner at Bury, Lancs, a rich, blatant, boasting sort of man who had risen from the ranks and never been able to shake off the pipe clay.

"Thanks most awfully," he said. "Do *you* golf?"

"Rather!" said Tony. "Pretty well every day. As a matter of fact, I'm driving my car over to the course during the next hour. I'm going to lunch at the club, cash a check and play 'round. I shall see you. Have tea with me?"

"I should like to."

"Excellent! After which I'll fix up your bike at the back of the car and bring you home. Peddling about on these hills isn't much fun. Is that a bet?"

"Quite!"

"Then your road is that way. Look, you see that bunch of roofs? Well, do you see a thin white line beyond them? That's you. Take care of the hill. They've just chucked some flints about. So-long, then."

"So-long!" said the youth, who thought that he had never struck quite so charming a man before.

"Oh, wait a second," said Tony laughing. "Rather good luck meeting you. Got any money? I'm three miles from the house. I'm on my way to give a poor devil a fiver to get to the hospital and, like the flippety-

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gibbet that I am, I've left the money in another coat. It would be awfully nice of you to save my walking back. I'll hand the money back to you at the club as soon as I get there."

The undergraduate was really very delighted. He was a Bullingdon man and so made a habit of keeping his gold among his silver and pence. It gave him a touch of pleasant carelessness. He could just make up the money.

"Oh, Jove, that's very sound," said Tony. "I hope I may say that this was a good accident for us both."

"Rather!"

The undergraduate won a smile that would have put a tethered goat into a good temper.

And so Tony had the enormous satisfaction of getting properly drunk before midday on whisky, port wine, sherry, poisonous brandy, old ale and vermouth. It was epoch-making. He was personally conducted to a haystack by the boots of the inn and dropped like a sack of coals. There he lay in the sun, with his mouth open, until the evening, sleeping the sleep of the just. A tramp found him there and quietly ran over his pockets. The imaginary poor devil never got to the hospital, but the tramp was the cause of there being added to the English language several altogether new, ripe and staggering words which would have been most helpful to pilots and other craftsmen, especially those who coach from the towpath. Tony recovered some of his good temper, however, when he found that half a sovereign had slipped through a hole in his waistcoat pocket and was lying cosily in the

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lining. He returned to Quennor with a couple of bottles of whisky, one of which he handed with an unwonted burst of generosity to his wife. It was taken to her by Harry, who helped herself to a very stiff peg.

It is hardly necessary to say that Bury, Lancs, did not let the occasion pass without doing credit to all Bullingdon men, past and present. He would have had no lunch and been unable to pay his green fee but for the services of the member with whom he played.

And so, great merriment reigned at Quennor that night—that last night. Thoresby had the pleasure for the second time of hearing Mrs. Tony recite. She came down to the hall with an unfastened peignoir over her nightdress. Her appearance was quite Shakespearean. She and the two girls knew nothing and cared less of the fact that the following morning would find them all without a roof.

Careful to say nothing about it—every man for himself—Thoresby had that morning received a welcome contribution from his solicitors which would pay his fare to London and enable him to take a bachelor room in or about Jermyn Street. So *he* was all right and that was something.

He went to bed at one in the morning, tied his small collection of banknotes into a pocket handkerchief and carefully hid it under the mattress. Dear old Tony had a habit of wandering at night.

As a rule he undressed in the dark or by the light of the moon, but he had that afternoon found about

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an inch of candle in one of the other bachelor bedrooms. So he lit it and indulged in a half an hour's quiet reading as he lay in bed, with the soft air playing upon his face. His book was Barry Lyndon, his favorite book. He had an immense admiration for Thackeray's delightful creation.

He had just blown out the wick, which was guttering in a little pool of wax, when he heard his door open and saw Harry slip into the room and stand in the moonlight, a white figure with an olive face. She came over and sat on his bed, folded her arms and looked at him with a quietly determined smile.

"I had another dream last night," she said. "I dreamed that you leave here to-morrow and go to London and that you take me with you. I'll meet you at the station in the only decent clothes I've got. I shall make you very happy." She bent down and kissed him and wound her arms around his neck.

\* \* \* \* \*

It was broad daylight before Tony picked himself up from where he had been lying on one of the rugs in the hall. He made his way out and around to the bachelor wing and upstairs. He saw Harry dip out of Thoresby's room like a swallow and disappear. He stood quite still for a moment, chilled to the bone. Then a desire to commit murder overwhelmed his brain. Then he drew up and metaphorically shook hands with himself as he crept away along the passage. "A very useful night's work," he said to him-

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self. "Now I think I can make Master Billy pay up that five hundred and a bit over. A pickled rod is a damned useful thing."

He threw himself on his unmade bed and went off to sleep with a smile on his face.

## PART II

### CHAPTER I

**M**ISS OKEHAMPTON, Miss Emily Sarah Okehampton, had lived at the Red Lodge, Sydenham, for more years than she cared to remember. She herself was a little, precise, essentially good woman with an abundance of white hair, which she endeavored to make the least of, and a small bird-like face. She had always dressed herself in wide, rustling skirts and that was sufficient reason why she should continue to do so. She wore boots with low heels and patent tips, and black silk capes, and bonnets which were scrupulously unbecoming. She kept a small dog, which was now very old, in order that she might have something to obey her commands. She kept a companion for the same reason, a spinster like herself, but not from choice. She kept, also, an old housekeeper, an old coachman, an old footman, who waited at table and cleaned the windows every Friday, and two old horses which drove her out every afternoon, if fine.

She had a place for everything and everything was in its place. She was a strict churchwoman and regarded the Almighty as a very offensive creature who



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kept a hell for those unfortunate people who never got over their mistakes. She agreed with this and believed in Gladstone. She had a day for everything. The dining-room was turned out on Monday, the morning-room on Tuesday, the drawing-room on Wednesday, her bedroom on Thursday, Miss Smedley's rooms on Friday—window day—and the hall on Saturday. She rose, unless indisposed, at half-past seven every morning, conducted prayers in the morning-room at half-past eight and breakfasted at nine punctually. From ten o'clock until half-past ten she read the *Morning Post* aloud to Miss Smedley. At half-past ten she interviewed the housekeeper and cook. At eleven she went forth with the dog and Miss Smedley, if fine, returning at twelve to write letters and send off newspapers and magazines to those of her relatives who lived abroad. At one o'clock she went to her room to prepare for luncheon, a function which was held precisely at one thirty. At a quarter-past two she retired to the morning-room, where she enjoyed forty winks, until ten minutes to three. Miss Smedley then brought her her bonnet, cape and gloves and in damp weather a linsey woolsey shawl. With her companion similarly garbed and carrying the dog, she proceeded along the tessellated path to her carriage and drove slowly around the Crystal Palace until four-fifteen. Tea was at four-thirty and was a gay meal. The rector sometimes took it with her and other old ladies living near. At five-thirty she proceeded to the morning-room for an hour's meditation, during which she sometimes read the "Cloud of

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Witnesses" or the sermons of eminent divines. This was the hour in which Miss Smedley visited the post-office in order that the dog might have a little airing before dinner. Miss Smedley understood dogs and was very patient when called upon. She was an orphan and, although her salary or remuneration was not large, her home was very comfortable. She was not a dog lover by nature. She preferred cats, because they fended for themselves. At six-thirty Miss Emily Sarah Okehampton went up to her room to dress for dinner and returned at seven-thirty, precisely, wearing two diamond stars fastened accurately upon her black silk bodice, which was cut high and relieved with Irish lace. Dinner was a pompous meal, conducted with great gravity. The footman wore the family livery and pumps. Even the dog was not permitted to make his appearance until the dessert arrived, when he invariably sat on Miss Emily Sarah Okehampton's right side and received several tit-bits which had been held back. At eight-thirty an adjournment was made to the drawing-room, where Miss Okehampton enjoyed the *Church Times* and other responsible organs, while Miss Smedley played a symposium of national airs upon the upright piano. At ten o'clock, to the moment, the housekeeper entered to inform Miss Okehampton that the hot water bottle had been placed into her bed, whereupon Miss Okehampton led the way to the morning-room for evening prayers. At half-past ten the only lights in the house were in the bedrooms, and at eleven o'clock everything was in darkness.

Of the Red Lodge itself it is hardly necessary to

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speak. The Christian names of the worthy lady who lived in it are in themselves almost a sufficient description of its furniture and appointments. Suffice it to say that there were ornaments in glass cases, fire-screens worked in worsted, ormolu clocks which told the age of the moon, the day of the month and several other things equally important, including the time. The chairs had antimacassars, and the bedrooms, texts. There were chandeliers with ringlets of glass and much heavy furniture of highly polished mahogany. The drawing-room was scrupulously uncomfortable and, indeed, the hand of the Albert period was stretched upon it all. The pictures were after Landseer and included portraits of the royal family. Only one picture had anything really human about it, and that was a very spirited engraving of a ship's rescue by lifeboat, but this was only seen by those visitors who stayed in the house. It filled them with a sense of adventure and self-help.

The Red Lodge was surrounded by a garden of an acre in extent. It mainly consisted of well-rolled gravel paths, interrupted by squares of closely shaved lawn. Here and there were patches of fir trees and rhododendron bushes. There was a small summer house in the shade of the wall. In the season red and white geraniums gave a touch of color to the place and in the spring the anæmic, pale, spinster-like blooms of three laburnum trees added a note of sadness. Miss Emily Sarah Okehampton, together with the Red Lodge and its garden, were all under the shadow of the Crystal Palace. That glassy monstrosity, unbe-

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lievably hideous in its design, formed the keynote in the character of the maiden lady and of the Red Lodge.

And it was to this house and to this good woman, as regular in her habits as the Crystal Palace was regular in its lines, that Dick was sent on the break-up of Quennor—Dick who had lived like a lark or a squirrel—Dick to whom regularity was an unknown thing.

## CHAPTER II

**I**MAGINE a sunbeam captured by a scientist and put into a bottle. Imagine a forest pony between the shafts of a governess cart. Think of a young thrush thrust into a small wooden box with only half a dozen narrow wires in front. Let imagination run riot. Conceive a hundred peculiar, impossible and even cruel juxtapositions and not one of them will compare with the impossibility or the cruelty of giving Dick into the hands of Miss Emily Sarah Okehampton of the Red Lodge, Sydenham—Miss Okehampton, Miss Smedley, the little old dog, the little thin old housekeeper, the little plump old coachman, the little fish-like old footman and the Red Lodge, Sydenham, with its terribly correct clocks, its prayers, morning and night, its irrevocable routine, its intense cleanliness, its shining furniture and the persistent shadow of that monstrous glass abortion, that triumphant relic of the antimacassar period.

The break-up of Quennor left Dick stunned. The whole world seemed to have fallen about her ears. Not to belong to Quennor, to the hills and the woods, seemed like death. To be separated from Harry was like having only one arm. To be cut off from her mother, who was a genius, which accounted for every-

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thing! Not to be able to curse Tony and to be made to laugh by his irresistible coarseness! What had she done to deserve it? It was a revolution. The enemy had captured her kingdom. She was a prisoner of war, and in her wild way, her perfectly natural, uncontrollable way, she called the Red Lodge Hell.

Miss Okehampton was Tony's first cousin, the only daughter of his father's brother, Sir Almeric Okehampton, who had sat on the Admiralty Bench until he could neither see nor hear. Then he retired gracefully to make room for younger judges. A rumor of Tony's misfortune reached her by a roundabout course, but it was not until she saw his name in the gazette as a bankrupt that she wrote a letter volunteering to undertake the care of his eldest daughter, whom she had never seen.

How Tony and his wife and the two girls had lived between the enforced departure from Quennor and the day upon which he underwent his first examination in bankruptcy no one will ever know.

When Dick stepped silently out of the carriage and came up the tessellated path of Red Lodge, with the great, wide eyes of a wild bird, her face and neck and hands were tanned like those of a gypsy and her golden hair was bleached by the sun. She looked as though she had slept under haystacks and washed in running brooks and tramped the countryside. In all probability she had.

Thoresby, neatly encamped in a bed sitting-room in Jermyn Street, was told that Tony and Mrs. Tony were taken pity on by a local butcher and put up for

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some weeks, not so much from a sentiment of charity, as because, being owed a few pounds, he thought it good policy to keep his creditor under his eye. He heard, too, that Dick and Harry had run away from the little house in the High Street of King's Redesborough, and had lived like rabbits in their old woods around Quennor, and that they had finally been captured, kicking and struggling, by Tony and a dozen rustics who would never forget their exciting girl hunt.

The end of it was that Tony was offered temporary hospitality by a bachelor nephew who lived in Whitechapel, where he was attached to the Oxford House Mission; that Mrs. Tony was taken charge of by a relation who was one of the leaders of the Woman's Suffrage Movement and lived in a bewildered house in Bloomsbury Square, in which every room was filled with pamphlets, banners, hammers and other implements of hysteria. Harry was placed by Thoresby in the house, the garlic-reeking house, of an Italian woman who taught stage dancing. It was in the neighborhood of Wardour Street. Dick thought it was very kind of him.

Dick's first week at Red Lodge was a nightmare. She took part in the routine as a convict takes part in the enforced routine of prison life. Her very clothes, purchased by Miss Smedley ready-made from the Sydenham Bon Marché, seemed to her to be those which are served out to convicts. To the morning and evening prayers she shut her ears, and during these times went back to the hill in spirit and put her face to the sun. For a week she was monosyllabic,

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like a person in a foreign country who restricted herself to yes and no, barely understanding the language that went on around her. The monotony, the quietude, the punctuality, the utter respectability of each day dulled her senses. The drives in the afternoon, with her back to the horses, and her eyes meeting those of the two elderly ladies, which were filled with a constant expression of triumphant pity, were almost unendurable. The only hours that were her own were the silent hours of the night, and these were not wholly hers. She had to gag herself when she wept.

She got no comfort from the suburban trees, and the cheeky note of the sparrow gave her no refreshment. To look at the glistening hard lines of the Crystal Palace made her shudder.

During the second week her soul was filled with the spirit of revolt. She spent each night making elaborate plans for escape. She would return to her old haunts and be free again. But each day deadened her again. Miss Smedley began to take her in hand. It was discovered that she was lamentably ignorant of even the very rudiments of knowledge. Her spelling was deplorable. Of arithmetic she knew nothing. Her fingers had never touched the keys of a piano. She thought that Mendelssohn was an acrobat and Händel a lion tamer. To Miss Smedley's tearful consternation, she had never read the Bible or heard the Lord's Prayer.

It was realized by the gentle, narrow souls in Red Lodge that a bomb shell had fallen upon them.

It was on the first day of the third week, when Dick



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had made up her mind to climb out of her window in the middle of the night, that a car, a low lying torpedo-shaped car, stopped at the house, and a young man of a fresh, round, clean-shaven face and brown hair full of obstreperous kinks came into the hall bringing with him a note of humanity which sounded to Dick like a breeze among her trees.

Sub-Lieutenant John Calverly Euston, second son of the late Field Marshal Viscount Euston, cut the rope down which she had intended to slide.

### CHAPTER III

**T**O Dick this boy was something new—something altogether new and delightful. She had read about such boys in the battered books which had been used as missiles by her father. She had seen drawings of just such a boy in the few illustrated papers which were left at Quennor, but this was the first time that she had met one face to face. He seemed to her to be awfully clean and tidy and fit. His eyes surprised her. They were so clear and the whites were so white. She liked his shyness. It was funny. She liked the half nervous, half cheery way he had of looking at her. She thought his clothes were quite topping. She had never been quite sure before that there were really men like this. She had grown into the belief that her father and his companions peopled the earth.

Young Euston had come to make inquiries after Miss Okehampton's health on behalf of his mother. His mother and Emily Sarah had been at school together and had kept up a very close friendship. Jack wasn't very keen on the job. He knew the house and the neighborhood, and if there was one thing which made him bristle like a terrier it was the sight of the Crystal Palace. He had made up his mind just to stay a quarter of an hour and bolt, but the oval face

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at the window, with its wide, steady eyes and golden hair, caused a sudden revulsion of his plans. He did not leave his engine running as he intended to do. He stopped it and he sat over tea in the drawing-room, until Miss Okehampton rose to go to her meditation. He said very little, actually, to Dick, but in describing his life on-board H. M. S. *Bellerophon* he looked nearly always at her. He made other eyes than those of the caged bird dance. The two old ladies had not known such pleasure for many months. The contagion of youth and energy was irresistible.

Jack got up reluctantly and when he said good-bye he did a thing which showed that his future was full of promise—that he might even become an Admiral. He said: "By Jove, I'm most awfully sorry. Mother was frightfully keen on my bringing you a new book that she's gone on. I forgot it. Do you mind if I bring it out to-morrow?"

"On the contrary," said Miss Emily Sarah, "it will afford me very great pleasure both to receive the book and yourself." She bent forward and kissed the boy on his forehead. There was a time when she had nursed him upon her knee.

Dick sang a little as she went to put on her hat in order to join Miss Smedley in unwilling humanitarianism. Her well-laid plans of escape were forgotten. She had something to look forward to. Miss Smedley was surprised and extremely flattered at the girl's outburst of chatter. She congratulated herself upon having won her. She had always known that she ought to have been a mother.

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The next afternoon came all too slowly, but it found Dick in front of her looking-glass. Instinctively she took more trouble with her hair. She liked this boy. He was a corker.

Oddly enough, the book was one which Miss Emily Sarah had read and recommended to Lady Euston in one of her letters—those old-fashioned, pedantic, slanting letters, the fourth page of which was written over crossways.

Jack's laugh was heard by the old horses in the stable. "Well, I'll tell you what," he said. "I've never been inside the Crystal Palace and so my education has been neglected. How about my taking you all there?"

Such a proposition staggered Miss Okehampton. She regarded the Crystal Palace as something solely for the edification and enlightenment of the populace. For her to go there would be an all too frivolous escapade.

Underneath her somewhat unprepossessing exterior Miss Smedley had a kind, if sour, heart. "Cannot the two young people go together?" she ventured. "It would help my pupil to see the specimens of foreign trees and suchlike." The dear good woman was matchmaking already. If she had been as young as Dick, the name of that boy would have been treasured in her heart.

Jack threw her a grateful glance and labeled her a sportsman. Miss Emily Sarah conquered all her early-Victorian objections to so harmless a proceeding and, a little fluttered, consented. The afternoon was

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very bright and she supposed that she really must move somewhat with the times.

If only the thrushes and blackbirds and bumblebees and beetles who missed Dick so badly could have seen her dancing along the prim road in step with the chortling boy it would have done them good. It did Jack good. There was a touch of color in the pale face and a very different look in the gray eyes.

He didn't say a word until he got three hundred yards away from Red Lodge. Then he stopped, threw back his head and shot out a great laugh.

"Who'd ha' thought it?" he said. "By Gad, who'd ha' thought it! I'd have bet anybody my balance at Cox's against it. You don't know Miss Okehampton."

"Oh, don't I?" said Dick.

"Oh, I beg your pardon, Miss Okehampton."

"I'm Dick," she said. "What are you?"

"John, to uncles and aunts. Jack to my pals."

"Then buck up, Jack!"

This was good. These two young things felt that they had known one another since the beginning of time. He was a boy and she forgot it. She was a girl who ought to have been a boy, and the afternoon belonged to them both. He paid the shillings and went into the place which he had avoided like the plague. They found themselves in a long passage with uncovered boards and sides plastered with advertisements painted on tin. Just as they were beginning to think that it would never end it ended and they came out in the very center of this unnecessary mass of glass just opposite a distant organ. Its notes came to

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them hollowly and they made out a little black speck writhing on a seat high up in front of it, a wilderness of seats, here and there speckled with black, spread out all around it. Their view was interrupted by the leaves of tropical trees, which looked to them like great despondent hands with many fingers and emaciated arms. Tin pot pieces of statuary shivered among them all dull and sad. A broken chain of people strolled here and there, leaving awaking echoes as they went. They passed a shabby refreshment place, outside which there were an inconceivable number of lonely tables—iron tables with tops which once had been white. Disconsolate waitresses sat about and yawned.

They ventured further, passing stalls and kiosks, each with an attendant, whose listlessness broke into eagerness at the sight of a human being—stalls fitted up as bedrooms, or hung around with ready-made clothes of atrocious cut, or for the display of a new invention for sharpening knives. They saw and heard mechanical piano-players as hard and as bright as the glistening glass above them, gramophones, kitchen utensils, sewing-machines, bassinets, leather trunks, soaps and scent bottles, sweet stuff, and heaven knows what besides. And above the sadness and despondency of it all there was the wailing organ, breaking now into quivering sobs and now into deep rumbles of piteous appeal. It was appalling; so tragic that Jack laughed to keep himself company and presently took Dick's arm and hurried her out into the air.

The sun did its best to glorify the utter commonplace of the scene before them. There were gritty

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paths covered with pieces of paper and the wrappers of chocolates, and match ends, long slices of turf in terraces railed in squares of iron, and below these terraces and beyond more gritty paths there was a very town of ugly, bright, small buildings and kiosks and stands and foolish little rural places behind grottoes, inside which idiotic games were played, threepence entrance fee. National flags were flying in the breeze, and somewhere an indifferent band was playing a tune long since out of date. Away in the distance there were noble trees and vistas that were almost countrified. Half a score of elderly men and women, young children and cockney boys and girls walked about in an aimless sort of way and a few foreigners tried to be merry.

"Ye gods!" said Jack. "Just exactly what I expected. I vote we sit down and try and forget it. At any rate, this isn't Red Lodge."

"Not for me," said Dick. "I think this is absolutely wonderful. Why, it's thirty times bigger than any circus I've ever seen. I'm going to do everything."

"Right-o," said Jack. "It's up to you. I got you out and that's the great thing."

Dick looked at him quickly. "How did you know?" she asked.

"Well, I'm not much older than you are and I know Red Lodge. What have you done?" He asked this curious question without any touch of the chaffiness that had been in his voice up to now.

Dick thought it out carefully. "I dunno," she said. "It's just my luck, I suppose."

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"Are you the daughter of the man who——"

Dick nodded.

"Oh, by Jove, I'm sorry. What a rotten thing to say!"

"No, it wasn't," said Dick. "You see it wasn't Tony's fault. It was just his luck, too. We Okehamptons have been out of luck for a long time, ever since I was born, I think. I never remember any."

"Who's Tony?"

"Father. He may have lost Quennor and gone bankrupt, but, by gum, you should see him shoot! He can drop a woodcock with a single barrel in a gale of wind and he's one of the finest poachers I've ever struck and I've struck a few. Pretty useful, myself. 'Round Quennor it's father first, then Harry and then me."

"Who's Harry?"

"My sister. I wish you knew Harry. My goodness, she's something like something. She'll spin the old name up, I can tell you. She's a dancer."

"By Jove! Which theater?"

"No theater, yet. She's with a woman in Wardour Street, or some such name. I always write to her at Jermyn Street, although she lives at the other place. She asked me to."

Jack looked at her quickly. "Why Jermyn Street?" he asked involuntarily, before he could stop himself.

"I dunno—oh, by Jove! Here's one of these joy wheels. I've never seen a really good one. Are you on?"

"Anything you like," said Jack. He had begun to feel that this girl needed someone.



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Half a dozen Australian cadets, one or two servant girls on holiday, and a fat Frenchman with three little girls in socks and short Tartan skirts were putting in an hilarious time, returning again and again to sit in a tight clump in the center of a more and more rapidly spinning circle to be shot off in an ignominious heap, one by one.

Jack and Dick became part of this merry crowd and wedged themselves in among great boots to wait for the next spin. The fat Frenchman was the first to go. He made a resounding thud against the bunker. Two servant girls followed him, clasped together, giving superb imitations of pea hens when disturbed. Jack followed with Australia on and about him. On spun the board faster and faster until at last the whole cargo had been discharged except Dick. With her head down and her long legs stretched out in front of her and hands planted firmly at her sides she sat as though glued to the center of the thing, a very blur of a girl.

*"Vive l'Angleterre!"* shouted the Frenchman. *"Vive le sport!"* Cheers rose and Jack shouted himself hoarse, laughing like a maniac. The board reached its summit of speed, slowed down and came to a full stop, and then Dick picked herself up and walked quietly off.

"Had enough," she said. "Can't we eat something?"

They left the place and Jack's sides were sore. "I'll tell you what it is," he said. "I'd like to plant all the old women at the Admiralty on that thing. Make 'em a bit human. What about some chocolate?"

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"That's the notion!" said Dick. "With almonds in it. It's—it's two years next October since Harry and I got hold of a bit of chocolate with almonds in it. There were no gold mines at Quennor."

Jack bought enough chocolate to keep a starving garrison going for a week and they marched about for the next half hour munching complacently, jawing about everything under the sun. And then they heard a clock strike and saw that the shadows had lengthened.

"Hullo!" said Jack. "We shall be knocked off this sort of thing if we don't get back pretty quick."

"Get back!" cried Dick in dismay. "Already!"

"'Fraid so. Law and order, you know. How about my coming down again the day after to-morrow?"

"Make it to-morrow."

"Can't. Frightfully sorry. I'm playing golf at Sunningdale. Competition. However, I've got three weeks' more leave. I fancy I shall be a well known figure in the Crystal Palace before that comes to an end."

"Then," said Dick, "I sha'n't do a guy, after all."

"Do what?"

"Oh, nothing. Come on. Let's get."

She marched away and it was in silence that these two went back among the tropical plants and the tin-pot statues and out of hearing of the wailing organ and back to Red Lodge.

When Jack turned his car homeward its pulse was not quicker than his own. "Oh, my Lord!" he said. "Oh, my Lord!"

## CHAPTER IV

ONE afternoon, without saying a word to Miss Okehampton, Jack drove Dick into London. Again and again she had asked him to take her to tea somewhere where there was a band and where she could see some of the people described by Harry in her apparently picturesque letters. Jack cursed himself for giving in, but was no longer in a condition to deny Dick anything. Luckily, she had never made use of her powers before, but this was only because she had never realized them. Like her father and Harry, Dick was a chameleon. She took the color of her surroundings. In the course of one day it would have been not only easy but irresistible for her to have been a little nun among nuns, a hooligan among musical comedians, a silent, wide-eyed emotionalist among musicians and a slangy, cigarette-smoking, card-playing, ankle-displaying young person at any of the country houses which harbor the members of semi-society. With Jack, Dick was full of energy, cheeriness and clean-mindedness, perfectly happy to listen to his descriptions of work and sports, to sympathize with his ambitions and to dance along at his side even among the smug roads of Sydenham.

There had been some cloying suggestion of scent in

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Harry's last letter. It got upon Dick's Tony-side. It stirred in her a wild desire to sit in the very heart of so-called civilization. Harry's letters were ill-spelled and full of blots, but almost Balzacian in their vividness. Egged on to go faster, Jack drove through the boundless suburbs and over the river and so into the endless stream of traffic. Dick's face was almost impish as the car dodged in and out among motor buses like a torpedo boat at naval maneuvers. She threw chaff at policemen, screamed with laughter when they only just managed to evade a collision and sat with flushed cheeks and two rows of small white teeth gleaming. She became an altogether new Dick, an astonishing, curious Dick to the boy. Her deviltry amused him and frightened him. He was delighted with her courage and a little shaken by her recklessness. As to the rules of the road she knew nothing and cared nothing. When a policeman held them up she implored Jack to ride him down, to bowl the beggar over. It seemed to her to be an utter waste of time not to cut around the wrong side of safeties, and when they went through the Park: "Now then!" she cried. "Let her go. Man alive, what's the row? You're creeping like a funeral hearse. We can fly here."

Jack shook his head. "Nothing over ten allowed," he said, and made it so.

Her annoyance was transient. A moment later she cried aloud with joy at the sight of the charming old warm buildings of St. James's Palace, and when they took St. James's Street at a rush and turned at last

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into Piccadilly she heaved a sigh of deep satisfaction. "This is London." she said. "This is it."

The street was alive with people and traffic. The sun brought out all its color and flashed back from the windows of the shops. Flags were flying on the buildings and the incessant roar made Dick's blood race in her veins. She had never been in Piccadilly before. It was to her something of what the first sight of the sea is to a street arab, and when the car pulled up in front of the Circus Hotel she got out a little unsteadily. The noise, the movement, the shock of so many people had intoxicated her.

Just behind them a car, apparently designed as an advertisement, so enormous were its dimensions, drew up. The owner of it, a thin, undersized, pimply, curiously clothed youth, with a constantly twitching face, was sitting at the side of the chauffeur, a person just as precocious, but a little cleaner. Wedged in between them was a girl small enough to be thirteen, with an odd little black hat jammed right over her eyes. Her face was painted thickly. It looked as though the colors had been laid on with a knife. She was immensely amused about something and her loud laugh made people on passing omnibuses turn their heads. She got out, almost carried by the twitching youth. They were both well-developed degenerates, well known to the police, whose business it is to prevent scandals at any cost. Like everybody else who knew his London, Jack had seen these people many times. Dick burst into a laugh. "Aren't they the limit?" she said. "If Harry and I had come across

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those two at Quennor—well, I don't quite know what *would* have happened."

Jack touched her arm. "I say, I know a most sporting little tea shop just along the street, I vote we——"

"Thanks very much, Jacko, but this is me! I hope everybody's like that. Dear Miss Smedley was telling me about the Zoo. I shall be able to kill two birds with one stone."

Jack gave it up. It wouldn't matter just once, he thought. Dick was so altogether different. So he told the man at the lift to take them to the roof garden. Dick caught her breath and grasped his hand and laid her cheek against his arm. This was another of her new experiences.

"Oh, by Jove!" said Dick. "Isn't this top hole! Let's capture that table by the parapet." She made a rush for it and sat down. Through the stone work she could see a slice of the street and the tops of people's heads. It was like being in a balloon. The sun touched her hair. She held up her face to it and shut her eyes. "Ah!" she said. "This is something like. At Sydenham the sun always seems to be dressed in black silk."

Jack ordered tea and gazed at the girl in front of him. He was mightily in love. To him she was an exquisite wild flower, something to live for, to work for, to be things for.

The band was playing precociously. The leader, a little thin foreigner, played the violin with extraordinary expertness, mostly making harmonics and twisting the tune out of time to suit himself, and all the

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while he played to some particular person with a sort of precocious sheepishness. There was an air of precocity about everything. Precocious boys were entertaining either very young girls in very short skirts or elderly bulbous women dressed young. A little breeze made the awning flap and the sound of the traffic was a mere hum.

Dick was delighted and excited. This, then, was life. It made Sydenham feel like something woolen to the touch. "If I told Emily Sarah about this, she'd have a fit," she said. "And I think dear Miss Smedley would go and buy a packet of cigarettes out of pique."

Jack laughed. He knew the place backward and had long since given it up, but it was infinitely jolly to see Dick enjoying herself. He had something of the satisfaction of a confirmed Londoner who personally conducts a country cousin over the Academy.

"Who are they all?" asked Dick. "Who are those dolly boys and those queer little women?"

"The Lord only knows," said Jack. "The ones wearing old Etonian colors are West End shoppees' sons. The painted ones have migrated from the suburbs. They generally come out like gnats at sundown."

"The word for them is poisonous," said Dick. "They're frightfully amusing, aren't they? It's like being at a theater. Not that I've ever been. That's another thing you've got to do for me. My aunt, aren't I a yokel?"

"I like you best as a yokel," said Jack.

Dick's face broke into a broad grin. "Then I don't think you'll like me very long, Jacko. I'm going to do

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everything and see everything before I've done. I'm going to taste every conceivable sort of wine, smoke every imaginable kind of cigarette and know every available type of person." There was more than a suggestion of her mother's peculiar phrasing about this little outburst.

Just as the tea appeared a large piece of cake hit Dick's cheek. There was a scream of joy. Dick turned in the direction of it and looked with unrecognizing eyes at a girl sitting at a table to the right of the band. She was wearing a very French hat which hid her hair and came down just below her eyebrows. Her face was dead white and her lips bright red. She waved her hand wildly and showed a set of strong teeth that looked like a dog's. An elderly man, almost too well-groomed, had his elbows on the table and another man in the twenties who might have been a post-impressionist artist, who dressed the part, was seated opposite.

"Dashed infernal cheek!" said Jack. "I wish to Heaven this was Maidenhead or somewhere. I'd duck those two rotters."

"Who *are* they?" asked Dick. "I believe it was the girl who threw the cake—look out!"

It *was* the girl. Laughing like a maniac she snatched up another piece and threw it unerringly.

Jack was on his feet. To the immense amusement of everyone near he went across with clenched fists and his lips pressed tightly together and a curious paleness about his nostrils. He was just going to lay hands on the younger man when the cake-throwing



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girl shouted out: "Don't be a damn fool! That's my sister."

Jack hesitated. He told himself that she was lying, but he watched her get up and cross the place swiftly. He followed her and heard her say: "My God, Dick! Are you blind or what?"

"Harry!"

Dick would have thrown her arms around the neck of this little English Parisian but for a quick whisper. "All right. Go steady. This is not the place for touching domestic scenes. Who's your boy?"

"Jack," said Dick. Her eyes were wide with admiration. Harry *was* going it.

"Oh, there are schools of Jacks," said Harry. She turned. "Got a name?" she asked.

"Euston!" said Jack.

The girl laughed. "Why not make it Paddington or King's Cross while you're about it." She took Jack's chair and beckoned to her male friends. They obeyed eagerly.

"As we're all little gentlemen, I suppose I'd better introduce you." She proceeded to the business theatrically. "Dick, Sir Edward Morde, M. P., and Monsieur René de Maingauche."

The two men bowed and eyed Dick nastily. She had made a capture of them both.

"And, oh, I beg your pardon," said Harry. "This is Mr. Baker Street."

## CHAPTER IV

**T**HAT afternoon metaphorically gave Sub-Lieutenant John Calverly Euston a step. With only a week of leave left and with every road leading to Sydenham, he pinned himself down to his mother's house in Eaton Square. Everything he looked at—the walls, pages of books, newspapers—had in it two wide, appealing, gray eyes, but the boy shook himself like a St. Bernard and turned his back. He knew what would happen if he went to Sydenham again. Dick would want London and Harry, and he was not going to be a party to either. He hung about the house, sent his car to be examined, knowing very well that it was in perfect running order. He smoked until the roof of his mouth was raw. He planted himself down in front of books, having only read one in his life before right through—"Westward Ho!" In a word, he underwent the tortures of the damned, being torn two ways. He wasted one good week and filled his poor mother's brain with a hundred fears. She eyed him closely and surreptitiously and invented a hundred answers to her one incessant question: "What is the matter with Jack?" Her loving consideration for the boy caused her to say all the wrong things to him. When she saw that his eyes were looking clean through

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the morning paper she said: "Why not go out, dear, for a little walk?" When he had chucked the paper away and taken up his stand with his back to the empty grate and was trying to drill two holes through the wall which blocked out his view of Sydenham, she said: "Why not go around with your car and take Alice for a little turn. You used to be so fond of Alice." And when the boy who adored his mother snapped out some irritable thing and stood at the window cursing himself, she said: "Why not go along to your hosier in Bond Street and set yourself up in winter underclothing. There's no time like the present."

And when at last "why not" took possession of his brain like the refrain of a comic song, Jack avoided the mother who had been, and still was, and would always remain, his best and dearest and shut himself in his own room, slamming the door behind him. It was then that he wished with a sort of red-hot pain up and down his spine that he had never seen the oval face with its golden hair and great wide eyes behind the window. He told himself that it wasn't good enough, any of it. It made him behave like a negro to his mother. It rotted every hour of his day. It made him treat himself as a suspicious character. Think what he might have been doing with this last week of a precious leave! Having said all these things in words out of a well-selected naval dictionary, he would take off his coat and waistcoat and roll up his sleeves and give himself the soundest thrashing a man could have, after which he would go down to his mother and be frightfully cheerful and write little

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letters for her and advise her as to what to have for dinner—something for a change.

Grimly, doggedly and like an honest chip of a fine old block, he hung out until the morning of his last day, when, giving himself no time to argue, he made a bee line for the garage, took no notice of the man with his, "Lord love me! But I can't find anything the matter with this 'ere car!" got in and drove to Sydenham. He didn't stop to think that his arrival at such an hour would throw the whole Red Lodge routine into unbelievable chaos. He rang the bell and said: "I want to see Miss Dick, please."

It was an altogether unnecessary question. In the middle of an attempt to wrestle with the intricacies of the spelling of "mischievous" Dick had heard the approaching hum, was on her feet before the car had drawn up and out of the astonished door before Miss Smedley could say oh! or the butler find words for Jack.

She collided with Jack. He bent like a tree before the force of a gale. She pushed him out on the step and shut the front door behind them. "Oh, Jack, Jack!" she said. "You devil! You rotter! Where have you been? Oh, my God, I've missed you! It's not a week. It's a year, a lifetime. Oh, Jacko, I thought you'd forgotten me. I was just going to die and be buried."

The boy seized her in his arms and kissed her again and again and held her close and gave thanks to God and then stood as red as a beet root, looking awfully uncomfortable and ashamed of himself.

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Dick's eyebrows were raised and she burst into a little laugh. "Great work, Jack!" she said. "Hot stuff, old boy! Didn't think you had it in you."

Never in this world had there been a man so utterly nonplussed as Jack. The yokel who saw the first railway train was not left more wordless. He felt just as though he had kissed a younger brother. Perhaps it was a good thing that Dick didn't give him much time for further thinking.

She caught hold of his coat. "Dash it," she said, "interview Emily Sarah and get me off for the day. Isn't this your last day?"

"The absolute last."

"Go on, then! Don't waste a second. Think of me all the time you're away. Oh, my aunt, I shall become a cabbage or an antimacassar. For my sake get me off and let's go for a bust. I'm very nearly desperate. Any lie will do!"

Jack rang the bell. The butler reappeared. There was a little color in his cheeks and something suspiciously romantic in the corner of his eye.

"Will you please ask Miss Okehampton if she will see me for a moment?"

"Certainly, sir. Will you wait in the morning-room?"

"No, thanks. This'll do."

"Oh, quite so, sir."

The butler went upstairs to the guest's bedroom. As no one ever stayed in it, and the morning-room was now required for Dick's lessons, Miss Emily Sarah had turned it into a little boudoir for herself, thus giving

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a shiver of almost unhealthy excitement to Red Lodge.

The little old lady, as neat and precise as usual, was reading the *Morning Post*. Her lips moved as she read. The butler's timid entrance filled her with a sense of alarm. Someone must be ill, or was the house on fire?

"I beg pardon, madam, but Mr. Euston——"

"Mr. Euston, at this hour?"

"I'm extremely sorry, madam, but Mr. Euston wishes—hopes—desires—in fact he would like to see you, madam."

Lady Euston was ill, perhaps dying. Miss Okehampton waved her hand and the butler departed. Trembling slightly, the elderly lady then removed her gold-rimmed glasses, tucked them carefully into their box, folded the *Morning Post*, picked up a small piece of fluff which had managed somehow to fall upon the carpet and seated herself with her hands clasped together.

When Jack entered the room he saw exactly what had happened. He went forward, laid his hand lightly on Miss Okehampton's frail shoulder and touched her forehead with his lips.

"Mother's as fit as a fiddle," he said, "but she didn't send her love because she didn't know I was coming. All the same, you have it, and mine, too, and everybody else's. It's like this. I've come to see Dick. I'm in love with Dick. I shall never get over it. This is the last day of my leave. May we have it together? Say yes, like a brick."

The little old lady didn't quite seem to know what

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to say or do. The whole thing was so unconventional. Of course, the boy was a sailor. She must bear that in mind and the sea always had a sort of tumbling effect upon people. "My dear boy," she said, "I—this is so—I'm sure I hope—but you're so young, and Dick—and the whole day! Alone! Oh, dear me! Dear me! What times these are! I think I must have lived too long."

Jack kissed her again. He was a born sailor. "Just this once," he said. "I'm very nearly your son, you know, and she's an angel. And, of course, being very nearly your son, I must be a bit of an angel, too. So it's quite all right. Thanks, most awfully."

He was gone. If H. M. S. *Bellerophon* had witnessed this bombardment of early Victorianism, she would have spanked out all her pennants of triumph and glee. Nelson himself would have seen the thing with his blind eye.

Dick was waiting at the bottom of the stairs, shaking like a leaf. Dear Miss Smedley had heard Jack's voice and had never moved from her seat in the morning-room. Cupid, in his secret place, felt a qualm of conscience. Why had he overlooked this woman?

Jack slid down the banisters. It was the next best thing to an aeroplane.

"Hat, quick!" he said. "Bundle up. You'll find me in the car."

Dick couldn't slide up the banisters. From an engineering point of view it was impossible. She took the stairs four at a time, seized the first hat that came handy, wounded her head with the pin and was down

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again in a flash. And when the two elderly ladies, into whose lives love had never come, heard the door bang they sat very still and both their hearts seemed to tumble.

"Which way?" asked Jack.

"To the trees," said Dick.



## CHAPTER VI

**W**HAT other trees were there for Dick than those around Quennor, those under which she had been born and bred, those with every one of which she was on terms of the closest friendship?

Jack knew his way to Beaconsfield. The rest was easy—up, up all the way. There were the Chilterns, quiet and dignified against the sky. They went through this place and that, all very sleepy and all happily only just touched by the vile hand of the jerry builder, barring one big place where the old and the new made one great olla-podrida.

The sun was very warm. The year was not older than the middle of September and was like a beautiful middle-aged woman on one of her best days. There were many of the remains of youth everywhere. It was only here and there that the sere and yellow peeped out, and if you didn't look too closely into the neat cottage gardens, you didn't see the autumn flowers.

Dick saw nothing and saw everything. She was free. She was going back. It was like Heaven. She said so again and again, and as she came in touch again with never-to-be-forgotten corners and patches

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and wild stretches she fell into a sort of ecstasy. The London Dick, the excitable Dick, the slangy, slap-dash Dick and even the Sydenham Dick were all left behind. She was Dick of the trees, the birds—Dick; Dick who had sat at Billy Thoresby's side and gravely explained to him all the reasons.

She almost cried when they turned into the one main street of King's Redesborough, leaving the two large inns on the right and the little old market square on the left. And when she saw the white cross cut into the side of the hill she gave a sort of sob, and after that all her babble ceased. All her graphic and minute descriptions of squirrel hunts and a thousand and one other adventures came to an end. She sat with her hands clasped together and a smile on her face, with the breeze fingering her golden hair, and took the place into her soul.

Jack had called her an angel. Whenever he was able—a good, and therefore a cautious, driver was Master Jack—he glanced at her face. He had called her an angel, but had not been quite certain that this description fitted her. But now he was dead sure. She looked like a child in church. It was wonderful. He would never believe, no, never, that Dick would ever be capable of anything that was not straight. Her slang, her oaths, even her occasional blasphemies, startling, ingenious blasphemies, were tricks caught from association. They were not Dick, the real Dick. To-day the very real Dick was sitting at his side. If this boy had loved her before, he adored her now. He couldn't do much, but he could give her one day.

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She gripped his arm and pointed to the right. He turned into a narrow road, a very twister—the sort of road which a bicyclist intends to take until he gets to the middle, but which he then walks, panting. Jack's car needed a change of gear, and even then made no small beer of it. At a word from Dick he stopped. He then saw Dick stand for a moment with her arms stretched out before going forward with a sort of cry. He called out to her, but she took no notice, and went up the hill like a goat. Jack ran the car on to the turf at the side of the road, shut off his engine and piled all the provender which had been bought *en route* into an imposing heap. There were two tongues in glass jars, a loaf of new bread, a big cake with almonds on the top, two bags of apples, any number of half-penny buns, some salt in a paper bag and half a dozen bottles of ginger beer. Also, there were two peculiarly blunt cheap knives and two forks which bore no relation to silver. Two youngsters came down singing a song about "I know the way I'm going," and hitting the hedge with sticks. "Hi!" said Jack, "you two men! What about earning something?"

They were true children of Buckinghamshire. They were ready to earn anything, however small. They were also ready to work for it—up to a point. Jack loaded them up, arms and pockets, stuffed his own and led the way. He could see Dick standing against the sky, and plodded up. There were curious stunted bushes of gorse here and there like warts upon the face of a giant. The short grass was burnt almost

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yellow and broke at the touch, showing chalk beneath. Shadows chased each other, and bees went by, and a dazzling haze was over everything. Jack unloaded at the top and solemnly handed the two lads, who knew their way, a shilling apiece. He saw that they looked at Dick with very reminiscent eyes and took great care to keep well out of the range of her arms. They had a bit of news for mother. One o' they devils from Quennor back agin! How it would spread! Jack bundled them off. "Go on," he said, "mizzle!" and away they went. A shilling spelled endless joys. They disappeared down the hill again like rabbits, one more like a rabbit than the other. The seat of his trousers stood in need of attention.

"So long as we stay here," said Jack, "we shall be more or less able to keep an eye on the car."

His voice broke the spell. Dick turned around and grinned. "I say, Jacko," she said, "shan't we be fat! And, my aunt, aren't I hungry! Car? Oh, that's all right. Nobody'll run away with it. Watch me!"

She picked up a knife, cut the string on a bottle of ginger beer, let the cork out expertly and put the foaming stuff up to her mouth. She drank until she spluttered and gasped for breath, called out: "Coming over!" and pitched the bottle at Jack. Jack finished it.

"Topping!" said Jack. "Wish we'd brought a dozen. Now the thing is how to get at this tongue. I've been fiddling about with the beastly thing for minutes. You got any idea?"

"What's the notion?" asked Dick. "Want it

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opened?" She took it, set it lid downward upon the grass, picked up a big stone and buzzed it at the glistening bottom. The glass smashed to smithereens. The tongue was badly dented. It was also stuck all over with different sized pieces of glass.

Jack looked a little rueful. "Well, that's one way," he said.

"Always believe in short cuts," said Dick. "Life's brief! I say, the bread's hot." She cut herself a hunk, sat down like a tailor and munched. "Supposing you were a good shot," she said, "and you had a new-fangled sort of gun that threw a bullet about a mile and a half and you aimed the eighth of an inch to the right of that tree which looks as though it had a broken arm, you'd plug Quennor bang in the middle of the front door, allowing for wind."

Jack was busy making the tongue eatable. "How about our driving over to Quennor after lunch?" he said, thinking to please her.

"No how," said Dick. "I wouldn't go there for a thousand pounds." She gulped down something and then laughed. "You're like an old maid with that tongue. Chickens take glass as a medicine. Cut me a hunk and don't worry about the fat."

They put away a most excellent lunch and then found that they had a tongue, half a loaf and two bottles of ginger beer in hand, as well as most of the cake and several buns. The apples had disappeared.

"Quite useful," said Dick. "We shall need this later. Now, then, up you get. Come and be introduced." She started off toward the beeches.

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"Hi! Wait a second! We can't leave all these things here."

"You're a regular spin," said Dick. "Now, then, express surprise in your best English." She went down on her knees, carefully moved several big squares of turf and disclosed a very neat cache, at the bottom of which was an old biscuit tin, a broken wine glass and a knife with one rusty blade. "Relics," she said. "Hike 'em in." The cache was loaded and covered up and away went these two, arm in arm.

"Trees," said Dick. "Best of all trees, bow like little gentlemen to Sub-Lieutenant, the Honorable, John Calverly Euston, R. N., H. M. S. *Bally ruffian*."

Jack held out his hand. "How de do?" he said. "Any friend of Dick's is a friend of mine."

## CHAPTER VII

**T**HERE was an infinite amount of rough philosophy about Dick, the sort of philosophy that is served out by a beneficent Providence to gypsies and artists, drunkards and dog thieves. She had the power to forget for the time being every thing that it was unpleasant to remember. She could make herself a sort of island of an hour or a day and surround it with an immeasurable stretch of sea. She could cut herself off from what had happened and what must happen and revel in what was happening, like a sandboy. This is something which cannot be bought or acquired. It is born in people. It is a gift.

It seemed to Jack, and he was not a man of much imagination—he regarded imagination with a good deal of suspicion—that Dick's progress up and over the hills and through the woods was almost a royal one. It struck him that the birds sang louder and followed her from place to place all a-flutter with excitement, that the long fingers of bramble in the hedges caught her affectionately. Her laugh seemed to stir even the silent beech trees which stood stoically among dead leaves, in endless uneven lines, always un-

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touched by the sun except when it swept across their heads, bringing out a dozen different shades of green.

Jack had his work cut out. For hours he dodged about after Dick. She was a very will-o'-the-wisp. She felt it to be a solemn duty to visit all her old haunts. To leave one would be to make it jealous. The hours teemed with history. Every place had been the scene of some exciting adventure. Every place reflected a different phase of Dick's ubiquitous career. She had been the last of the Mohicans here, a famous broncho-buster there. Elsewhere she had played the part of a Canadian log roller, an Esquimaux, and nearly everywhere she had been a very complete English poacher.

The energy, the vitality of this slight, golden-headed girl was amazing. She scrambled through hedges, made small work of hills, and led Jack through what seemed to be a maze of trees and all the time she kept up her stream of reminiscence. Her childlike glee, the intense pleasure she found in the beauty of everything put the boy more than ever under her spell. She took not only the color of her surroundings, but of Jack himself. He saw the best of her, all that was clean and sweet and simple. It was all very good. Every minute of these hours was filling the comb of his memory. Ages ago she had thrown her hat away and flung her hair loose. Jack rescued the hat and stuck to it grimly. It was characteristic of him to cast an eye forward. Presently they would have to go back into civilization, where hats were essential. Besides, it was a good hat. It was Dick's hat.



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It gave him a certain sort of comfort to carry it about.

He was the one who felt hungry first. "By gum!" he said. "What wouldn't I give for a drink and a hunk of cake!"

"Good Lord!" said Dick. "You are a pig. You think of nothing but eating. Bags I the rest of the ginger beer."

And off she went at top speed, with her hair flying behind her. When Jack came up with her, hot and breathless, the cache was open and Dick was coolly drinking, with a most contagious laugh in both her eyes. All the same, she understood the laws of partnership. If anything, she took rather less than her share. They were both rather tired and were very glad to lie full stretch on their backs.

"Well," said Jack thoughtfully, "to-morrow at this time I shall have said: 'Come aboard, sir.'"

Just for a second Dick shivered as though struck by a cold air. Then she made a gesture as though she had taken something in her hand and thrown it away. "How would you like me to be a novelist," she said, "a really top-notch novelist?"

"Great!" said Jack. "Could you?"

"Why not? It's only a question of making up my mind to be anything I choose. Yesterday I decided to be the leading portrait painter of the day, but I resigned because it means being indoors such a lot. A fuggy game. I'll tell you why I've decided to be a novelist. I can write here."

Jack sat up and looked at her. "There's a lot of

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money in it," he said. "All publishers leave enormous fortunes. But can you write a novel straight-away without being taught?"

"It's just about the only thing you can do without being taught," she said. "Any fool can write a book, and it's just that that makes me give up writing at once. It's too easy. I know!" she said with a burst of inspiration. "I shall compose. I shall write music. That's my line. This time next year look out for my face walking about in hundreds in the streets, and look in at the biggest building there is and spot me mounted up in front of a music stand wagging a stick. That 'ud be a bit of all right, wouldn't it, Jack? A hundred a day or something, eh? You could touch me down for a bit from time to time, old boy. Rather nice for you to be able to say to your friends: 'Know Okehamptonwesky, the waltz king? Rather! Close pal of mine!' Wouldn't it be great to have a hundred or so spot musicians sitting at your feet and bring out of them waves of music and then hear a roar of applause? Yes, that's my job, composing. It's settled."

"Good luck!" said Jack. She said that it was settled and so there it was.

"And as for you, Jack. You've got to be the youngest Admiral in the British Navy. Otherwise nitter!"

"That's a bet!" said Jack. "We'll both rise to great heights."

"Doesn't matter about your making money, you see," she said, "all you've got to do is to make a name. I *must* make money. There are father and mother, you see. Now Tony's a man who simply must be a

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Squire, and he must be able to write checks as ordinary people strike matches. It's in his blood. That's where I come in. I shall buy back Quennor, spend about a quarter of a million on the place, put it in thorough working order and build on a wing for myself with a music room about as big as the Albert Hall, or a little bigger, perhaps. Must have elbow room. I shall have to run a gang of tame musicians, and that means building a little town of houses for them, somewhere, where it won't spoil the scenery. Pretty good notion, don't you think so?"

"Pure, Dick," said Jack.

And all the while the sun was sinking and shadows were growing longer and birds were singing their evening songs, and far away in Sydenham two elderly ladies, one elderly butler and several elderly servants, to say nothing of an old dog, were listening anxiously for the sound of a motor car.

And still these two young people sat on the hill above the world turning dreams into solid facts, utterly indifferent to the passing of time.

It was a very commonplace thing that brought Jack down from the clouds. He heard the toot of a motor horn away in the distance and sprang to his feet. "Great Cæsar's ghost!" he said. "What are we playing at?"

Dick stretched herself and heaved a contented sigh. "Living," she replied.

The glory of the setting sun had left the sky. Red and gold had melted away. The broken line of horizon had become slightly smudged. A mist lay over

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the valley like thin smoke. A light or two winked in the village far below them.

Hard facts stared Jack in the face. His mother, the two old ladies—Great Scott! was this the way he played the game?

Dick was singing softly. She looked exquisitely comfortable with her hands under her golden hair.

"Your hat," said Jack. "Be quick! We must go. Never mind about the grub."

"Go? Go where?"

"Back, of course." Jack held out his hand. "For the Lord's sake, get up!"

Dick took the hand and got up and stared about her and looked at Jack's serious face.

"Go? Where?" she repeated.

"Those old ladies—it's not playing the game."

"Then it's—all over." She rolled up her hair and put on her hat and without a word followed Jack down the hill to the road. She heard him give a shout.

"My God! Where's the car?"

## CHAPTER VIII

**T**HERE was no sign of it. A little patch of oil had almost dried up. It must have been gone for hours.

"Pinched," said Dick.

Jack gazed at her blankly. "What am I to do with you?"

A wave of sympathy for the two elderly ladies ran over Dick. For the first time in her life a sense of law and order made itself felt. It had been frightfully nice of them to let her go, without a word, without a warning, without even a long list of don'ts. It was nearly dark. Already Emily Sarah and dear Miss Smedley would be holding their third or fourth consultation. Their nerves would be wrung. The whole of Red Lodge would be in a state of chaos. She saw the whole thing in a flash. Almost she could hear the very things they said—"Dear me! Dear me! Alone with that boy, and cars so uncertain, so dangerous! Anything may have happened! Oh, pray God they are safe!"

"Well," said Dick, "one thing's pretty certain. Some blighter's nicked the car. We can't get back by gazing at where it stood."

Jack's brain was reeling. What a cursed fool he

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had been not to watch the time, not to keep an eye on the car! He was responsible for this girl. "What's to be done?" he asked.

"My good Jack, the choice is limited. Either we go by train or walk."

With another exclamation Jack stuck his hands in his pockets and started a more and more worried search. He had a latchkey, a penknife, a box of matches, a beautifully ripe pipe, a battered tobacco pouch, a glove button, a 'bus ticket, but not one blessed cent.

Dick stamped with impatience. She wanted to get back as much as she had wanted to get away. The two elderly ladies had been very kind. She was dog-like in her gratitude for kindness. "Oh, Jack, what is the matter? What in the world are you playing at?"

"Not a bean!" said Jack. "And not a blessed thing that I can sell. I'm most frightfully sorry, but we must walk. How far is it?"

And then all the devil in Dick took hold of her. This was the most epoch-making adventure of her life. One more night on the top of the hill! Let elderly ladies fume and fret! Let Jack lose his motor and his hair! Let every one of the inhabitants of the earth go dotty! What did it matter? The thing couldn't be helped. Let it be enjoyed.

"How far?" she cried. "A thousand miles, and if you want to walk there, you may."

"What do you mean?"

"What I say, Jacko. Walk there! Go on, walk there! And when you ring the bell of Red Lodge

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somewhere about eleven o'clock to-morrow morning, looking like a tramp, give 'em all my dear love."

"What do you *mean*?" repeated Jack.

"Don't I make myself quite clear? I am staying here. Alone. I shall wait here with the remains of the cake and a bun or two until you show up with another car with a letter of commiseration from Emily Sarah." She could hardly contain her excitement. She took off her hat and sent it skimming into the air as though it were a plate. She threw up her arms in the manner of an Indian native and whirled around and around.

"You're mad!" said Jack.

"Qui-ri, Jacko. Mad as a blooming March hare, old boy. Oh, it's my delight on a shiny night in the saison of the yar——"

Jack seized her by the shoulders roughly and tried to hold her. She was like an eel, but he held her tight by main force. "Do you mean to tell me," he said, "that you're really going to stay here alone, or are you bluffing?"

An odd look of Tony came into her face—Tony when diplomatizing himself out of a tight corner, Tony at his most specious. "My dear old boy," she said, "what else is there to do? Car gone. No money for a train. Nothing on you worth twopence halfpenny and walking a mere farce. Don't you see that if we were to tramp a consistent four miles an hour we shouldn't even then get to Sydenham until breakfast had been cleared away and washed up. It's—why, dash it, it's sixty miles."

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"No, it isn't. It's barely forty."

"Well, what's fours into forty—you see? It's the hill, old man. It's the hill. There's no way out of it—hurray!"

Jack was in a fever. Once again he went over every one of his pockets. "I'll sell my clothes," he said, "to get the fare."

Dick's gravity was portentous. "I don't *think*," she said, "that they take passengers in that condition."

"Then I'll borrow money. I'll raise money. I can write a check on paper and get 'em to cash it at the pub. Damn it, my name's good enough. And, after all, it's only a matter of ten bob."

Dick held her breath. Somehow or other she must queer that idea. It was too good. She burst out laughing. "Try it on!" she said. "Just you try it on! Walk into any pub in King's Redesborough or any tradesman with me anywhere near—well, try it!"

"I don't care," said Jack. "I will try it. I'll leave you half a mile away. I'm going back to London to-night, whatever happens."

Dick held out her hand. "A thousand thanks for a very pleasant day," she said. "So long, dear Mr. Euston. I hope you'll have a nice journey."

A laugh hung on the air. Dick had gone.

Jack stood still, but only for a moment, half a moment. If he didn't follow immediately, she might give him the slip. She was in the mood to do anything. He went up the hill after her like a man possessed of devils. He was angry and glad. He adored her and



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would have her to himself for a few more hours. He caught her up at the top of the hill.

She turned fiercely, breathing hard. Her fists were clenched and her eyes flashing. "What are you going to do?"

"Stay with you."

"You darling! You angel! You Admiral! Shall we eat now or save it?"

"I dunno," said Jack, "anything you like." He sat down and loaded a pipe, lit it and puffed. He looked up at her with a smile. It couldn't be worse. It also couldn't be better. His leave was up to-morrow. He wouldn't see Dick again for the Lord knows how long. She looked more beautiful in this light than in any other.

"Hullo," said Dick. "How is it you haven't smoked before to-day?"

"Forgot."

"Never occurred to me, either. If you haven't got a cigarette, we're not on speaking terms."

"Then we're not," said Jack. "All I can give you is a box of matches. You don't chew, do you, by any chance?"

Dick twirled an imaginary moustache. "By Heaven," she said. "Wit! Bravo, Major!"

Jack howled with laughter. It was extraordinary how intensely happy he felt. He blessed the man who had stolen his car, and no longer had a thought either for his mother or the two elderly ladies. He was more than ever under the spell of this girl

The night was exquisite. There was not a touch

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of autumn in the air. They ate the cake and the remainder of the buns and drained every one of the ginger beer bottles for the last drops, and jawed hard while the moon rose and the stars came out and all the little eyes of the village blinked at them from below. The mist had lifted and everything lay cut clearly at their feet. With the night Dick's mood changed again. She was the Dick of the moon, the inarticulate Dick, with eyes full of poetry and a sort of unconscious reverence on her lips, fumblingly. And presently, tired like a child after a long day, she went closer to the boy, curled herself up at his side and laid her head on his shoulder. She slept like a kitten.

And Jack remained awake, sleep impossible, and held her unconscious hand to his lips adoringly. Poor devil, he could have died of happiness.

## CHAPTER IX

**I**N this way the rising sun found these two. In those long but all too short hours many thoughts came to Jack and one returned to him—the one which passed through his brain on the way to the Crystal Palace. “She needs someone.” He revised this. It was very natural. It now ran: “She needs me.”

Far from having a disturbing effect on this boy, the night had the effect of making him doggedly determined, come what might, to make Dick his wife. He had seen, he thought, all her sides. Some of them startled, some appalled, but one, the big one, filled him with an immense admiration. She was worth winning, worth working for and waiting for. There was some magic about her that would keep her a child. The day had come when he would be unable any longer to break the monotony and the dull goodness and the irksome regularity of her life. He gave no thought to how long she would stand it. He just knew that whatever she did, whatever wild, uncontrollable, savage, unheard-of things that she rushed into on the spur of the moment, she would come out of unsinged. He knew it. He was certain of it.

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And there he sat, cramped and uncomfortable, in something of the sort of way that a mother sits at the bedside of a restless child who has at last fallen asleep, holding a hand which will not be withdrawn.

There was something very knightly about this boy, this very ordinary, crop-headed boy. He had fitted himself to ride beside the gaunt horse of Don Quixote, that most perfect knight. He had played the game.

He heard the birds wake and the first bee go by and sheep go bleating along a road. Like ants, men and boys moved about beneath him, and then a workman's train, strangely without sound, left a ribbon of smoke behind it, miles away.

He never moved. The sun was almost warm when Dick stirred, said something he didn't catch, threw out an arm, and opened her eyes. "In the middle of the ring made by the fairies a weird-looking little toad sat—What?"

"I didn't say anything."

"Hullo, Jack! What on earth are you doing here? What'll Emily Sarah say if she catches you here? They haven't called me this morning."

She sat up suddenly and looked around and rubbed her eyes and shivered a little. "Oh, my hat!" she said. "Here's a go!"

Jack got up and stretched himself and brushed himself down. He was rightfully stiff. A spider which had been ruminating on his sleeve flung himself into mid-air and swung on a thin thread of silver. "Dick," he said, "we now go down. It'll be a long time be-

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fore I sit on top of the hill with you again. Somehow or other I'm going to take you back to those old ladies. I hope to goodness they'll believe me."

"No one could do anything but believe you," said Dick. "You're like that."

The boy felt that she had tied a handkerchief around his left arm.

And then Dick turned to him with an awe-stricken face. "What *are* they doing in Red Lodge?" she said.

"Wait a second," said Jack. "Turn 'round, will you?" He bent down and brushed the grass and chalk off her dress with his cap. "Now then, full steam ahead."

They went down the hill. On the road they walked quickly, elbow to elbow.

"Walking?" asked Dick laconically.

"Station first. I'm all out to move the heart of the man in the ticket office. I forgot all about my links last night. I'll give him those for two singles. He can do what he likes with the change. Which road to the station?"

"No road," said Dick, "when there's a short cut across the fields." She took the stile like a boy. They plodded on silently at four miles an hour. They only passed one old man, who sang out good-morning. The ground on each side of them was all dry and in lumps. The hedges were full of blackberries, half ripe. They turned into the main road, leaving a still sleepy village behind them. Three hundred yards short of the station there were four cottages, very

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neat, with little patches of garden. On the wall of one there was a notice:

### COUNTY POLICE

"An off chance," said Jack:

He went up the path and knocked at the door. No one came. He knocked again and a bullet head was thrust out of a window. "What's your business?"

"Sorry to bother you," said Jack. "Just want to report that my car was stolen yesterday afternoon."

"Eh? Oh! Well, wait a minute, will you?"

Jack grinned. "A little matter of red tape," he said. Dick was looking back. Her trees made a line of fretwork against the sky. They seemed to be very far off.

Five minutes later the door was opened and a well set-up policeman in his shirt sleeves came out. "Oh," he said, "your car was stolen, was it? Wot do you generally do with a car when you're tired of it?"

"I don't follow you," said Jack.

"Seems a bit of an error not to follow the car, don't it?"

Jack became considerably more lively. "Hand it over, old man," he said. "God bless you."

"'Ope 'e will, I'm sure. But I dunno about 'andin' it over. There *was* a car——"

"Ah!"

"Yus, but wait a bit. There *was* a car drew in 'ere yesterday. No owner visible."

"And the reward is? Oh, buck up, man, buck up!"

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"Yus, we can all be in a bit of a 'urry, can't we, when it soots us? A gent—well, I suppose 'e's a gent, at any rate, 'e 'as a knack of gettin' as drunk as a lord, dirty little toad—went out yesterday afternoon to look at the beauties of nature or something, found a car 'angin' about, got inside it and went off to sleep. Bit o' cheek, but that's 'im to a turn. Woke up some time later, feeling better, made cooe noises to attract attention, failed—mind you, this is 'is story—took a fancy for driving the machine, lucky for 'im and the car 'e can drive——"

"Oh, go on!"

"Am goin' on. Don't quite know why I'm a-tellin' of yer. And as I was sayin', 'e tooled about the country, then I'm blessed if 'e didn't bring the car 'ere and land us with the thing! And a nice white elephant it's bin, I don't think."

"If he's barked her shin," said Jack, "I'll have an action for damages against him. Silly ass."

"Oh!" said the policeman cautiously, "it's your car, is it?"

"Great Scott, my dear chap, you don't think I'm talking to you for nothing, do you?"

"That's as may be. We've got the car. It was brought 'ere as a strayed, and, as far as I can see, it'll 'ave to stay 'ere."

"But it's mine! I tell you, it's mine."

"But I might say it was mine. What then?"

"Well, damn it, you'd be a liar, that's all."

"'Ere, 'old on. 'Old on. It's a bit early for words like these 'ere." He scratched his head. Jack was

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obviously a gentleman. "Dagged if I know what I'm to do," he said.

Jack kept his temper. He, too, was a victim of the endless line of red tape which twines around the legs of all Service men. "May I suggest, constable," he said blandly, "that you require me to identify the car?"

"Just what I was thinkin'!"

"I saw that," said Jack, "in your eye. You've made a note of the number of the car, I take it?"

"I 'ave."

"Well, suppose I give you the number, and, what's more, suppose I produce my license with my name on it? The number being right, the name remains."

"Ah, that's what I was thinking."

"You and I think wonderfully alike, old boy. Well, there's a big pocket behind the driver's seat. In that there are several letters."

"I've seen 'em."

"You're bound to be an inspector. It's a dead certainty. Number H. O. 4128. Name on license hereby produced J. C. Euston. How's that?"

The policeman read aloud. "Sub-Lieutenant Honorable John Calverly Euston. 'Har—'hem—mighty clever!" he said. "Shouldn't be a bit surprised if I took you in charge."

Jack almost sat down in a heap. "If you do," he said, "I'll put the Admiralty on to you and you'll wish you were dead. Oh, my dear chap, man to man, now! Man to man! Forget you're a policeman and I'll forget I'm a sub-lieutenant. I give you my word



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of honor that that car's mine, that I'm Euston, and that I'm in the devil's own fix. Is there anything more to be said?"

"No, but there's something more to be done. Just step inside."

Jack stepped inside. A good deal of fumbling went on and then a formal yellow piece of paper was produced crammed with printed matter.

"Sign 'ere," said the constable. "Full name and address, please."

Jack obeyed.

"And now follow me." With a certain amount of reluctance the man led the way to a large shed, several houses up. It belonged to a coal merchant. The padlock was undone and the doors thrown open. There stood the car, apparently sound in wind and limb.

"'Ire of shed or garage—well, dagged if I know. Owner ain't up."

"Well, how much do you think it'll be?" asked Jack.

"Well, may be 'alf a crown. May be five bob. Can't say."

Jack removed his links. They were gold ones. He handed them to the policeman.

"Bit irregular ain't it?"

"I paid a fiver for them," said Jack. "If the man charges five shillings, there's four pounds fifteen to divide, or not, as the case may be. Look out."

He cranked up, jumped in and backed her out into the road, performed a beautiful piece of finesse, drew

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up opposite to Dick and said: "Now then! Sydenham!"

Dick climbed up. Jack turned the car, and as he passed the policeman, who stood outside the shed, looking intently at the links, which lay in the palm of his big leathery hand, he called out: "Good-morning, Inspector!" and away he went, heading for the Crystal Palace.

## CHAPTER X

**T**HERE had never been so imperative a ring in Red Lodge before. A finger was pressed on the button until the elderly butler, who had not been to bed, opened the door. The sound of it reverberated, not only through the house, but through the hearts of every one of its inmates. The two elderly ladies, tired out after their vigil, expecting every moment news of an accident, the little old housekeeper, who had been sitting with her black silk apron over her head, clutched the arm of the footman, who, secretly something of a poet, was in the middle of writing a poem modeled on Whitman in a penny copy-book, describing the terrors of that unforgettable night

The butler looked from one grave young face to the other and then along the tessellated path through the open gate at the car. "Oh, thank God!" he said, and tears sprang into his eyes.

Jack wrung his hand warmly. Dick threw him a wan smile and crept upstairs to her own room, where she sat on the foot of her bed and stared hard at the wall. Everything had to be left to Jack. He had said so.

"Now then!" said the boy. "Take me up to Miss Okehampton."

"Will you take something first, sir?"

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"After, perhaps," said Jack, a little dryly. "It rather depends."

The butler led the way upstairs and tapped at the door of the boudoir. For a moment there was no reply. Both ladies dreaded to see the door open. It was Miss Okehampton who eventually said: "Come in."

"The Captain," said the butler.

The sight of those two pale faces and of the frail, trembling form of the dear little old-fashioned lady who made a landmark in his life stopped Jack's flow of cheerful commonplaces. Instead, he went forward perfectly naturally and said: "She's safe. Your prayers are heard."

Miss Okehampton only moved her lips. Miss Smedley, however, burst into tears.

"I want to speak to you. May I have ten minutes?"

Miss Okehampton had a great sense of loyalty. It was, of course, true that Miss Smedley, although a gentlewoman, was a dependant. It was equally true that certain matters, family matters, were not discussed in her hearing. But the sympathy, the extraordinary optimism, the tenderness, the unselfishness of Miss Smedley throughout that night made her no longer a dependant but a friend, and when Miss Smedley turned toward the door she was asked to stay. "Be seated, dear," said Miss Okehampton. "You have as much right to this room as I have."

It is very good, very helpful, very necessary to be rewarded. Dear Miss Smedley felt that even her life had compensations.

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Jack stood in front of the two ladies.

"Dick is safe," he repeated. "In any case, you had to be worried yesterday. I couldn't have brought her back until long after dark. I told you in the morning that I love Dick. I lost my head when I found I had her all to myself. So would you. We had—well, I don't quite know how to describe the day. I'm not a literary gent. But when finally I woke up and thought of you the car had gone. Stolen, well—as it happened—borrowed. I had no money. I decided not to walk, although Dick wanted to, because she was pretty tired, and we shouldn't have arrived until later than it is now. We went back to the top of the hill, Dick's particular hill, finished the cake and talked, and then Dick went to sleep with her head on my shoulder and I settled things for the future, I mean *my* future, which, of course, includes hers. That's all. I won't worry you with the details of how I found the car. I'll only say that I'm most frightfully sorry for giving you this fright. And please don't say anything to Dick."

When he finished Jack went down on his knees at Miss Okehampton's side and put his face against her arm, the thin arm clad in black silk, and his shoulders shook rather horribly.

It was then that Miss Smedley got up softly and tiptoed away. There was a little smile on her tear-stained face. Cupid had never been so near her before.

Jack got up all too soon, looking mightily ashamed. "Oh, damn!" he said. "I beg your pardon. But she's—she's—oh, I dunno. I think I'd better cut off to

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mother. I'm off to-day, you know. Be good to Dick."

And when Miss Okehampton was alone she sat perfectly still. She was looking back along a never-to-be-retraveled road at the face of a man who had never spoken.

## CHAPTER XI

THE routine of Red Lodge was sadly broken. The two ladies went to bed some hours later than they always got up. Dick's breakfast was taken to her bedroom with Miss Okehampton's love. The butler dozed over his *Daily Mail*. The housekeeper fell asleep in the linen room, in which there was a faint aroma of lavender. The maids went yawning about their work and the footman retired to the seclusion of his little bedroom and finished his poem. It ran to two hundred and eighty-seven lines. Even in the stables the effects of anxiety were still felt. The coachman neglected to polish the silver on the harness, placed a wooden chair outside the stable door and fell into a profound slumber, with a quid of tobacco making a strange bulge in his old cheek.

Dick, in her bedroom, no longer troubled as to the attitude of Miss Okehampton, left her breakfast untouched. Jack had gone. Jack—and all that he meant. Jack, who alone possessed the key of the great gates that shut her off from life. Jack, who hadn't even troubled to say good-bye and who never looked up before he drove away.

She couldn't help it. She had one great fit of silent weeping. It was the reaction. It was due to a sense

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of loneliness, almost of homesickness. Jack had gone. She had grown to look upon him as a brother. Good old Jack, what a corker he was! She thought of him in no other way than as good old Jack.

But young things easily recover, especially when they're hungry. She ate every bit of the cold breakfast and drank every drop of the cold coffee. And then she began to wish that even Miss Smedley would come up and take her to the postoffice in order to permit the elderly dog to enjoy a little gentle exercise.

But no one came near her until a maid appeared with a late but particularly nice luncheon, with Miss Okehampton's "apologies and hopes that Miss Dick had slept well."

Dick checked a rush of slangy irritability and restricted herself to the following message: "Please tell Miss Okehampton that I am now able to sit up and take nourishment, and for God's sake bring me a yellowback or I shall have a fit."

The maid was a sentimentalist. Jack was her bow idil. She had watched what she took to be the course of a love episode with a sympathetic flutter. Even she, though nicely brought up, would have been very near similar strong words under the circumstances.

And then sleep laid its consoling hand upon Dick's restless and mutinous brain. She flung herself on her bed and returned in spirit to the top of the hill, to listen and watch and run wild.

The maid who brought tea left it and crept away. She was not the same maid. She had heard one or two epoch-making outbursts from Dick and they had



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staggered her. But she told herself as she went downstairs that she had never seen anyone look so like an angel outside an illustrated Christmas number.

And then dinner came with another charming little message and Dick fell upon it. It broke the appalling monotony. It relieved the tension of this ultra-super-fine household.

When the sun had set and the windows of the house behind the chestnut trees opposite no longer looked as though the rooms were on fire, Dick submitted to the nightly torture of having her hair brushed and of being undressed. She always wanted to scream when she saw her clothes neatly folded, the clothes she would dearly like to have pitched all over the room. She got up when left alone and deliberately swept her ship-shape dressing-table into chaos and chucked her things here and there. Then she sat at the open window and sent off a series of marconigrams to Jack. "Good-bye, Jacko! You're a sportsman. Jack, old man, won't we just put in some topping times when you come back—so-long!"

Somewhere near two clumsy, lugubrious hands were playing the piano. The tunes were of the solid and meaty order, with potatoes and gravy and mint sauce and cauliflower and everything else that appertains to a thoroughly English dish, and were ghastly. And then a throaty man sang drawing-room songs of the cheerful, tombstone order, equally English, equally ghastly. Some people enjoyed themselves, at any rate.

She heard a policeman approaching and with great interest watched him pass and listened to his foot-

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steps as they died away. The musicians persisted until a clock in the distance struck eleven, when, with a sigh of thankfulness, she heard the piano close. Sydenham had its points. Then a man went by on a bicycle. He was evidently a beginner and was practicing in the night. His wobbly course amused her. And then she went back to bed and tried to sleep and thought of Harry and knew that if she were free she might just be having supper at the Circus Hotel, with the laughter of people everywhere and the band playing tunes that would make her want to dance. An overwhelming desire took possession of her to dress and climb out of the window and slide down the pipe on to the roof of the morning-room and then down the wistaria to the path, and so away. She fought with it. Emily Sarah had been very good, almost too good. If only she were an old cat who nagged her! Then she would have an excuse.

She remained in bed, struggling to sleep. All the same, a little devil whispered in her ear and put into her brain the idea that she had a grievance. Why was *she* here and Harry in the middle of things! Harry was younger than she was, and yet she had a topping time and knew delightful men and went everywhere. It was amazing that this thing had never occurred to her before. Having occurred, it gathered itself into an enormous ball, which seemed to roll down and crush her.

She buried her head under the blanket and said: "I *will* sleep. I will! To-morrow there are lessons and the two old ladies and the old dog and the antimacas-

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sars, prayers, the drive out, the little walk, that awful dinner, more lessons, more prayers and bed."

And then suddenly the clothes were flung off. Dick made a dart for her jacket. Yes, Jack's cigarette case *was* there! And it was full. Joy! She lit her candle, seized upon a copybook, a pencil and the cigarette case, sat up in bed and wrote poetry, smoking like a factory.

It was the duty of the butler to make an inspection of the house after the ladies were in bed in stockinged feet in order to see that there was no escape of gas and that the servants' lights were out. Also, he was required to see that the many ingenious and altogether useless burglar traps were properly set. So great had been the disturbance in that regular household that the butler, for the first time in the memory of man, had forgotten this important task. He hurried from his bed somewhere about three o'clock in the morning, dressed himself hastily and crept guiltily along the various passages. As he passed Dick's door, quivering at every creak, he detected a strange aroma.

"God bless my soul!" he said. "Something burning."

He sniffed and sniffed again. He was not mistaken. The house was on fire. The ladies must be saved at all costs. He ran to Miss Okehampton's door and knocked loudly. Then he opened the door. "Don't be frightened, madam," he said, "but I think you'd better dress. Something's burning."

He went to Miss Smedley's door, congratulating himself upon his coolness under emergencies—"I will



**"They all saw Dick sitting up in bed, cigarette in mouth."**



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be the last," he said, "to leave the wreck"—and then he warned the servants, returned to Miss Okehampton's passage and found her with a woolen petticoat around her shoulders, trying to soothe Miss Smedley's hysteria.

"I smell nothing," she said. "And you know how keen my sense of smell is."

This was something of a shock to the butler, something of a damper. He might have overlooked his duty, but he certainly had not partaken of illicit intoxicants. "Please to follow me, madam," he said. He led the way to Dick's door. He was well rewarded.

Miss Okehampton sniffed. Miss Smedley sniffed. The housekeeper, who now came upon the scene, sniffed. The maid sniffed and the old dog sneezed.

"Break open the door!" cried Miss Okehampton.

The butler opened it and stood back, expecting a rush of flames. Instead a beautiful scent of Egyptian cigarettes filled the air. It was a new smell in that house. Even the coachman only smoked in his yard when the wind was in the south.

Through a great mist they all saw Dick sitting up in bed, cigarette in mouth, with a little mountain of cigarette ends decorating the saucer-like stand of her candlestick.

"Leave me," said Miss Okehampton. "All of you." She entered the room and shut the door.

\* \* \* \* \*

An hour later, trembling in every limb with excite-

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ment, anger, and perhaps a little regret for having said things which even Tony in his soberest moments could hardly have worded so picturesquely or with such a complete knowledge of biblical distortion, a slight figure skimmed down the water pipe onto the roof of the morning-room, put her feet into the branches of the wistaria, scuttled across the well-kept garden to the gate, went out into the road, and left the glistening roof of the Crystal Palace behind.

## CHAPTER XII

**I**T was half-past five when Dick stood on the Albert Bridge and watched the water lapping along. The tide was going down. As well as she could remember, she had followed the roads taken by Jack in his car. The relief of finding herself at last on an open space, able to breathe, after having tramped through miles of smug slums, through the hideous and sordid villadom of the suburbs, was tremendous. She watched a Rochester barge go under the bridge with wind and tide, its large brown sail bellied out, its owner, tanned down to his throat, sitting on the highly decorated cabin rail, holding on to the thick pole of the rudder, a sort of country barber's pole, painted like a sugar stick. A nose-warmer clay pipe, quite black, was stuck between his teeth. It left a thin trickle of smoke. When Dick decided to become a composer it had never occurred to her how admirable a career barge sailing was. From that moment she would reconsider her future. How ripping to slip down the river, with the wind flapping the sail, and a darling little cabin in which to cook savory messes! As to its being dull, bosh! You could have races with other barges and back your-



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self for a shilling. How splendid Tony would look lying full stretch on the black tarpaulin, with his fair mustache burnt with the sun and a jolly old pint pot of beer somewhere near! Think of his cheery passing remarks! He'd open the eyes of the bargees, bless his heart!

However, she had still some way to go. Her destination was Jermyn Street—172 B, from which Harry wrote occasional letters, very occasional. She left the bridge and the river and with rather dragging feet plunged into the slums, here and there rendered even more sordid by a great block of red flats with windows of bottled glass, until she came into what is called Lower Sloane Street. Shops were still shut. From time to time men hurried along to work. The sun tried to find its way through a sort of mist. On went Dick, recognizing buildings that had caught her eye before. She fumbled her way at last to Hyde Park Corner. Motor 'buses were running. On the steps of clubs men in shirt sleeves were shaking mats. The reluctant life of London had begun again. Dick kept to the Park side of the street. Its gates had been opened and a steady stream of flotsam and jetsam was going into it to squat upon its burnt-up turf and snatch a little uneasy sleep. In Piccadilly there were further signs of renewed life. Shop steps were being washed by slatternly women. The tube station was open and people went in and came out like bees, and then it was that Dick went up to a very stout policeman.

"Can you tell me the way to Jermyn Street?"

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"Can a duck swim?" said he. And then he looked at this simply dressed girl with the big eyes, who wore no gloves and carried no umbrella. He knew at once that this golden hair was golden. His tone altered. "See a boot shop down there, missy?"

"Yes," said Dick. She was awfully tired.

"Well, just on this side of it by them railings there's a passage or alleyway. Cut down there and Jermyn Street runs right and left."

"Thank you," said Dick. "Some 'day I hope to know London as well as you do."

"'Ope not, missy. Good-morning."

"Good-morning," said Dick.

She came out into Jermyn Street opposite a fish shop, whose tiled floor was being swished by a cheerful man who whistled a London version of an American ragtime. She saw from its number that her destination lay to the left. The narrow street, with its old and somewhat insalubrious houses, here and there refronted, here and there made modern by the smart mahogany doors of a small family hotel, felt colder than usual. She hurried along, examining each door for its number. Almost at the bottom of the street she came to 172B. Under the number there was a card upon which was printed "Bachelor Chambers." With a great sigh of relief she went through the open door into a small and rather dingy hall. An old man who might have been a retired valet was rubbing a whitish liquid on a brass bell.

"Lord Thoresby lives here, doesn't he?" she said.

"Eh? Oh, law, no."

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"What!" cried Dick. "And I'm doggo, absolutely doggo!"

"No. No dogs allowed 'ere. There ain't been a dog for—let me see now."

"But I was told that Lord Thoresby *did* live here."

"Eh?" It's an amazing thing that deaf people go out of their way to pretend that they don't hear when they hear perfectly well. "Well, them as told you that Lord Thoresby lived 'ere was right. 'E did. But it don't foller because a gent lives 'ere once 'e lives 'ere forever."

Dick sat down on the nearest chair. There were two and both looked as though they had come from a railway hotel in the midlands.

Hitherto the old man had not given his attention to Dick. He heard a little sob and was interested. He put down the tin and the rag, fumbled in a waistcoat pocket for his glasses and hooked them over his ears. He then became more than interested—a little, perhaps, surprised. "Why, God bless me, the girl's a lady!"

"You wish to see Lord Thoresby, miss?"

"I must!" said Dick. "I must."

"If I can 'elp you, you shall. You must excuse my being a little abrupt to you before. These are bachelor chambers, you know, and we 'ave a lot of what I call mixers 'ere, this being Jermyn Street, and so on. Now it so 'appens that his lordship removed 'is self yesterday. The address 'is man left behind was of a flat in Piccadilly, on the first floor. You can't miss it. It's got a big bow window at the corner of

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the street, 'Alf Moon Street. A nice place, fit for a peer or a real gent with no visible means of subsistence."

"Thank you," said Dick. She got up. She wondered whether she would be able to walk so far.

"Know yer way, miss?"

"No, but I daresay someone will tell me."

"Why, dear me now, I'll tell you, and me old enough to be yer grandfather! Now, look 'ere. Go right to the top of this 'ere street. As soon as you're at the top turn to the right. Cross the road, minding 'ow you go, and then turn sharp to your left again. Keep right on till you come to 'Alf Moon Street. You can't miss it, and the door of this 'ere place is the first 'round the corner. Ring and knock. I'd come with yer meself, on'y my young man's 'ad to be sent away. 'E's a klepto, poor chap. Suffers from what they call epiklepto fits. Are you all right?"

Dick smiled at him. "Quite all right," she said. "Good-bye. Thank you very much."

The man, who knew bachelors, watched the tired girl out of sight. As a sort of last effort of concentration Dick followed the directions. At nearly every doorway in St. James's Street pale-faced men in shirt sleeves were busily at work. In Piccadilly there was now a line of taxicabs in the middle of the road and motor 'buses were flying even more often than before.

"Taxi, lady?"

"No money," said Dick.

The man laughed. "Well, give us a bit of yer 'air. That's gold enough."

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Dick dodged an omnibus and turned to the left, and when at last she rang and knocked she could hardly see the very smart door for a blur in front of her eyes.

A thin, youngish man opened the door. His hair was very black and had obviously only just been wetted.

"Is Lord Thoresby at home?"

The man could not have looked more surprised if he had been told that the Germans had landed in England. "'E is, miss," he said, "but I 'aven't taken up 'is early cup of tea yet. I beg pardon, but it's barely seven o'clock."

"Please tell him that Miss Okehampton *must* see him, *must!*"

"Miss Okehampton?" The name came glibly. "But you ain't——"

"I said Okehampton. Will you please do what you are told!"

The man turned and went quickly upstairs. His eyebrows were raised. There was something very funny here.

Dick sat down on the stairs and leaned her head against the wall. "Oh, God!" she said, "I'm doggo."

It was not until the third knock that Thoresby alighted from the electric tramcar that he had been driving down Broadway. He had knocked off for dinner. "What?" he said.

The man went in. "Beg pardon, my lord. There's Miss Okehampton to see you."

"What?" There was immense irritation in

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Thoresby's voice. "But I'm not up. Dash it! It's the middle of the night. My compliments, or rather my kind regards—no, you'd better say love—and could Miss Okehampton make it convenient to call about nine o'clock to breakfast?"

"Very good, my lord." The man went out and went in again. "I beg pardon, my lord, but it isn't *that* Miss Okehampton."

"Oh, go away," said Thoresby.

"Very good, my lord. But this Miss Okehampton said that she *must* see you, she must. Very sorry, my lord."

It dawned on Thoresby that there was something very funny here. "Oh, Gee!" he said. "What are you talking about? I only know one Miss Okehampton."

"So I thought, my lord. But this is another. She calls 'erself Miss Okehampton and I can't 'elp believin' 'er. She *must* see you, she says, she must."

Thoresby came to the conclusion that the man had *not* been drinking. He got onto his elbow. "Now, then," he said, "let's go into this. What is this Miss Okehampton like?"

"Well, my lord, if you don't mind my saying so, she's as different from the other Miss Okehampton as a spring morning from a fog—golden 'air, big gray eyes, what they call a hovular face, and——"

"And be damned!" said Thoresby, springing out of bed. "Show Miss Okehampton into the sitting-room, and say I'll be down at once."

It was Dick!—Dick, whom he had watched all one

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summer night. By thunder, yes. She *was* different from Harry as a spring morning from a fog. Why had she come?

He got into a new and particularly excellent dressing-gown. He thrust his feet into a pair of new Russian leather heel-less slippers and then he did his hair. He got to the door, opened it, went back into the room, pulled open a drawer of his dressing-table, took out an absolutely new white silk handkerchief and made a stock of it. Then he went downstairs two at a time.

He saw Dick sitting in the window seat. A faint touch of sun had fastened upon her hair. Her hat was off and she looked like a flower upon which the rain had not fallen for a week.

"Dick!" he cried, "Dick!"

## CHAPTER XIII

**O**BEYING urgent orders, Stokes brought in breakfast, and an excellent breakfast, before the very new little clock on the mantelpiece had struck half-past seven. He found his lordship sitting quite far away from the young lady, looking at her as one who has been through the desert looks at water. At least, that was *his* idea. Dick was laughing and smoking a cigarette.

"All right, Stokes," said Thoresby. "When I ring it will be for more toast. Come on, Dick. You must be starving."

"Starving's a silly ass word," said Dick. "Do you know that I've had nothing really sound to eat since dinner-time last night?"

"Well, good Lord, that's not long!"

"It's a hundred miles of endless streets, that's all." She looked at the breakfast table with its new and pristine silver and its plates, which seemed never to have been used before. "Aren't we doing ourselves rather proud here, old boy?" she asked. "Aren't we cutting just a bit of a dash?"

Thoresby bent forward a little. If she was hungry, so was he. "And as to a fortune, to quote you, that's



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a silly ass word. His lordship has money to burn, stacks of the stuff. It's almost silly."

Dick raised her cup of coffee. "Cheers!" she said. "Hearty congrats! You won't find a stack of sportsmen to help you to spend it, I don't think. How did you do it?"

"I didn't do it. It did itself. A relation of my father's—I never saw her, but she must have been a most charming, sympathetic old lady—left whoever succeeded to the title enough and more than enough to keep his end up with dignity." He suddenly threw back his head and went off into a peal of laughter.

Dick was very busy with her knife and fork. "Oh, it takes you like that, does it?"

"Yes. Every three hours. I've laughed more since I received five thousand pounds on account from my solicitors—the wills has got to be proved and all that sort of truck—than ever before in my life. The bean-less Billy Russon pillowed upon the downy back of the oof bird, able to write a check just whenever he takes it into his head and know, what's more, that it'll be met with alacrity. The ubiquitous Billy Russon, whose whole life has been spent very completely on the long trail, in a harbor made by Hamptons—my dear, I give you my word that I chose and furnished this place with my brow mantling with blushes, as though I were a bridegroom. Look at it! Did you ever see anything like it? I should think I paid at least twice as much for everything as it is worth on purpose, just to feel the sensation. I slept here for the first time last night, and I stand up this morn-

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ing refurnished and redecorated from head to foot. Billy Russon is dead. Long live the Earl of Thoresby! There's only one other thing left for me to do—to sit among my brother peers and help to govern my country."

"Yes, I *don't* think!" said Dick.

"More scrambled eggs?"

"I hoped you'd ask me that. I've been willing you for five minutes. Oh, tell me, seen anything of Tony since the glad news?"

Thoresby laughed. There was a certain dryness in his tone. "No," he said. "And, by Jove, I haven't settled up with him. I must."

"Honestly, I don't think I should. I had a letter from mother the other day. She said that Tony was a changed man. He's been helping at the Oxford House Mission."

"Oh, no!" said Thoresby incredulously.

"Oh, but, my dear old boy, Tony's very versatile. Mother says that he sings country songs to little boys in the evenings, and, as they don't understand a single word, none of the parsons have thought it necessary to stop him. They're very ripe, you know."

"Well, but of course I must pay him. With the thousand pounds that I owe and a bit over for luck he could emigrate to Canada and make a fresh start."

"Is the flat racing season over yet?" asked Dick.

"On its last legs."

"Well, then, if you must play the game, dole it out in bits. Otherwise, Tony would plank the lot on the best thing in racing and go down."

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And so they went on, these two, talking like brothers of the road. It was very peculiar. And after breakfast they returned to the window seat, still talking, and smoked cigarettes—the man in his dressing-gown, the girl in her prim, ready-made clothes, the unscrupulous man and the girl with the face of a wild flower.

There they sat until the street below was alive with people and traffic and the sun was high in the sky. Dick told the story of her imprisonment at Sydenham. The description of her life there made Thoresby alternately laugh and hold his breath.

“Shall you go back?” he asked.

Dick looked at him as though he were a harmless lunatic.

“Question passed,” she said, “for lack of words.”

“But what are you going to do? Tony’s in Whitechapel, your mother’s in Bloomsbury and Harry’s—well, Harry’s on her own.” He didn’t know quite how to put it. “Where can you go?”

“Don’t worry about me,” said Dick. “I’m staying here.”

Thoresby was on his feet. “Staying here! What do you mean?”

“You’re the only friend I’ve got in the world, old boy. So you put me up. How about it?”

Thoresby walked about the room, touching things aimlessly with a hand that was shaking. Then he went back and stood in front of her. “Do you know what you’re saying?”

Dick took another cigarette. It was her twelfth.

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"If, of course, you haven't got a spare room in this place, say so. Then it's back to the army ag'in, sergeant. Back to the army ag'in."

"Ah!" said Thoresby. At the moment he was not sure whether he was glad or sorry. This girl was different.

Before he could talk about convention and utter stammering platitudes about what is done and what is not done they heard what appeared to be a fracas on the stairs, a conglomeration of loud voices, and then the door was flung open.

"Hullo, Tony," said Dick.

## CHAPTER XIV

**T**ONY was perfectly sober. His wife's description was not wholly inaccurate. He looked rather like a rough, big towel that has been passed through a mangle. He was dressed in a ready-made suit of gray serge. The trousers were a little tight. He wore a white collar and a black bow tie and a bowler which sat rather low over his ears. He had shaved that morning and combed his great mustache. He was much thinner and looked curiously older. He alone among men knew of the tortures that he had undergone for the want of drink. Just for one moment there was a flicker of the old generous, good-hearted, clean-minded Tony. He looked from Thoresby to his daughter and stood very still and straight. "You—too," he said. "Oh, my God!"

Thoresby hitched his shoulders uncomfortably. Once before he had felt the sting of a whip across his face.

Dick did not find it necessary to get up and kiss her father. She looked him all over. "My hat!" she said, "this is a day of surprises. We're all little gentlemen now, aren't we? Going into the church, Tony?"

Tony was looking at Thoresby. There was a nasty

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glitter in his eye. "You got a drawing-room here?" he asked. "Seems to be rather an unnecessary question. Swagger places like these not only have drawing-rooms, but billiard-rooms, morning-rooms and libraries. Just ask my daughter to take herself off to one of these, will you? I've got a word or two to say to you."

Thoresby opened the door. "Would you mind, Dick?"

"Anything you like," she said, "I'm in a mighty good temper."

She got up, taking a handful of cigarettes with her. She stopped in front of Tony and gave a soft laugh. "It'll do me a bit of good to be seen in public with you."

The veins in the man's neck thickened and stood out. He waved his arm to the door and Dick disappeared at a run. When her father looked like that he usually threw things, and his aim was good.

An odd thing happened when Tony found himself alone. He dodged about the room with a sudden gleefulness, like a man who has mined with no luck for years and suddenly discovers gold. He examined the little clock and the blue plates, the admirable engravings and etchings, the thick carpet and the assortment of extremely comfortable chairs. Hearing steps and the sound of a man clearing his throat, he threw himself into an attitude of righteous indignation. He was like an actor standing on the stage who sees the stage manager put his finger on the bell to give the signal for the curtain to be raised.

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Thoresby entered quietly and shut the door. He did not know this Tony very well, but his first remark had prepared him somewhat. "Welcome, old friend," he said tactfully. "It's good to see you here."

The stage had lost a splendid actor in Tony Okehampton. The tremolo in his voice was most moving. "Not content with taking advantage of my second daughter, Harry, and very nearly breaking my heart, you now entice Dick—Dick, the apple of my eye—into your foul clutches. Never again, no never shall I have any faith in the word friendship." He sat down heavily, put his hands over his face and burst into well-simulated tears.

Thoresby was greatly upset. This was a very uncomfortable beginning to his new career, a rather unpleasant housewarming. "Oh, my dear Tony," he said, "please don't do that. I give you my word that your suspicions are absolutely unfounded. I've done my best for Harry out of friendship for you, and this is the first time that Dick has ever been in this place."

"You damned liar!" cried Tony. "I know what I'm talking about. Harry's your mistress. You seduced her."

"I give you my——"

"You may swear till you're black in the face. Unfortunately, what I say is true." He had almost made a bad slip and said fortunately. Up to the present moment he had known himself to be in possession of a good hand. The sight of Dick made it a royal flush. Thoresby drew up a chair at the table and sat down.

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"Let us go into this, Tony," he said, "as man to man. How much do you know?"

This business-like attitude rather damped Tony's eloquence. "Do you think I'm going to be treated as a sort of customer?" he cried, intending to enjoy to the full what was to him a great moment. "I know you. So does everybody else. Your reputation lies behind you like a main road on the map. You think you're going to bargain with *me*, the father of this poor, wretched girl. You think you can buy my silence with some of the money you seem to have come into. If that's your idea, my Lord Thoresby, you're mistaken and so I tell you."

"Buy your silence! Get off your stilts, man, and talk sense. We are in London now, not Quennor. How did you know?"

This was a very awkward question. "Ah! Then you own to it, do you, you dirty dog? You own to having come under my roof, enjoyed my hospitality, been received with open arms, only to take advantage of a girl not much more than a baby. My God! It would make a nice story in the police courts. You'd look a little less smug if you had a notification from the public prosecutor."

Thoresby was making a pattern in the salt. "I didn't ask you to make a speech, old man," he said. "All I want to know is how did you find out? And there's one other rather interesting question I should like to ask you. Why didn't you look me up to blackmail me before?"

Tony made a gesture which would have done credit



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to Guitry. It indicated unspeakable pain. "I shan't be able to contain myself much longer," he said. "You make me see red—oh, Bill, what made you choose *my* home and *my* family? What have I done to you but good? What sort of future will this poor child have now? Oh, I know that she's not had a very good chance. I'm a weak and foolish man and things have gone badly with me. But as far as my children are concerned, I've played the game. I've guarded them from danger. God knows, I shall creep down to old age with bitter thoughts, but the remembrance of *your* having turned on me like a serpent will blacken them all."

"Yes," said Billy, "but how did you find out? I agree that you have a case. It's waste of time to dodge behind lies. I'll give you what I can either in a lump sum or bit by bit at stated times. I'm a respectable person now and I don't want any scandals. But just for the sake of old time's sake take my most comfortable chair and tell me without heroics how you found out. It is a matter of immense interest to me. For instance, I rather want to know—we're speaking as old friends, aren't we?—whether your master hand arranged this thing?"

"What do you mean?" Tony's voice was genuinely hoarse.

"Would you like me to put it plainer than that? I can. Is this, in other words, a put-up job?"

With a sort of roar, Tony caught hold of a silver cigarette box and held it above his head.

The imperturbable man on the other side of the

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table smiled blandly. "Dear old Tony," he said, "I reminded you before that this is not Quennor. I am *not* your wife."

The silver cigarette box found itself back again in its old place. Tony sat down. "I see that you must be dealt with," he said, "in the only way that you can understand. You have no sympathy with a father's feelings, nothing of the spirit of a man of honor left in you. Very well, let's come to business."

"Ah! now that's very sensible of you, old boy. I've always found it's better in the long run to settle these little matters amicably. Look here, I regret to say—I choose the word regret with a full appreciation of what it means—that I lost my head in your house. Since that time I have done what I could for Harry. Forgive me if I seem to be blowing a trumpet or anything of that sort, but I put her to a good dancing woman and made myself responsible for various bills of hers, frocks and hats, and scent and so forth. She won't have to grumble in the future, either. I can't very well do more than that so far as she's concerned. As for Dick—well, I don't ask you to believe me, but, fortunately, I can bring witnesses to prove that she ran away from Sydenham in the early hours of the morning and arrived here at seven o'clock. So we'll just wipe Dick off. She is not one of your assets. Dick is different."

"Make Harry your wife," said Tony.

Thoresby laid down the salt spoon. "Oh, please, no," he said. "Besides, from your point of view, wouldn't that be a little stupid? A man can't very

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well blackmail his son-in-law. No, think it over and fix your price. It's very horrid, my dear Tony, to be obliged to talk to you in this way."

Tony had begun to take on some of the color of his surroundings. The room was furnished in the most charming taste. Every detail of it was delightful. "It's appalling!" he said, "absolutely appalling! Conceive it. You, a man of family, and me, an Okehampton. By Jove—however, I think a thousand a year will meet the case, paid quarterly."

"Isn't that rather stiff? A thousand a year's a lot of money. And may I just hint that Harry—no, we won't go into that. I'll tell you what I think. I'll write you a check for the money I owe you in full—you don't hold my I. O. U., remember."

"Oh, dash it! Go straight."

"Oh, yes, yes. I intend to. I can now. It's rather nice. Mighty easy when you can, too. I don't take any credit for it. Well, then, I'll pay you that money and send you to Canada."

There was a derisive laugh. "Canada? Me! That's the best thing I ever heard. Now, look here, Billy, be straight, or as God's my judge I'll have the law on you. You know Harry's age all right."

"Well, it's up to you to make another suggestion."

A gleam of enthusiasm came into Tony's eyes. He pushed the breakfast things away and leaned on the table. "Old man," he said, "I've got a scheme. Put me into a flat. Trick it out nicely for me. Make it a place to which my girls can bring their friends. Harry's got 'em and Dick jolly soon will. Once there,

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I can keep an eye on 'em and see that they make marriages worthy of Okehamptons, and incidentally put in a few rubbers of bridge."

"Oh, I see!" said Thoresby. "A gambling hell, with the two girls as decoys."

"What a pity," said Tony, "that you've got such a horrid mind. At any rate, that's my idea. It'll suit me. I'm not as young as I was and the pursuits of country life have got a bit stale. I feel like London and a club and decent clothes to my back, a theater now and then and civilized society. You can do it for me and at the same time have the satisfaction of knowing that I shall be able to rescue Harry."

"One second," said Thoresby, "now, as to the word rescue. Does it mean taking Harry off my hands?"

Tony considered the point. He did not intend to give anything away. "Yes," he said, "it does if you pay rent, the furniture bill, and make me a yearly allowance of—well, we're old and dear friends—I'll let you down as lightly as I can—a tenner a week. There now! There you have Tony at his worst, foolish old Tony Okehampton, generous to a fault."

Thoresby turned away his head to smile. He had a good deal of delicacy. "Done with you," he said, "it's a bet."

A rush of blood suffused Tony's face. He shot his flannel cuffs and held his head higher and gave a curl to his mustache. By Jove, he was going to be a gentleman again. Ah, well, it was good to think that all his love and tender care of his children would reap its reward. He took up a cigarette and put it back

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again. "I should think," he said, "that you're a pretty good judge of a cigar. What? So am I."

Thoresby pointed to a large silver box, upon which his crest was engraved. "There you are," he said.

With a springy step and a sort of spontaneous flamboyance the proud father made for the silver box. "Coronas! Quite all right." He spiked one, lit it and sent two streams of smoke through his nostrils. His enjoyment was almost childish. "We smoke Virginia cigarettes at our Oxford House Mission," he said. "Civilization has its points. When may I expect a check to settle our small affair?"

"To-day."

Tony almost dropped his cigar. What a fool he had been not to stick to a thousand a year! This man had money.

"But I make one absolute condition."

"Condition?" sneered Tony.

"Yes, condition. When you leave this place you must take Dick with you."

"That goes without saying. Of course, I shall take Dick."

"Do you agree?"

"Yes. What do you mean?"

"I mean that I can't stand Dick in this place for another hour. Is that clear?"

"Quite clear, Billy, old man——"

"Then, get out."

Tony turned in surprise. Thoresby might have been talking to a dog.

"Get out. Go on, get out!"

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Thoresby opened the door and stood there with his lips pressed together.

For a moment Tony wavered. The place was very comfortable. It was around about luncheon hour. Then he helped himself to three more cigars and sauntered airily out of the room. "So-long, dear old friend," he said. "God bless you."

## PART III

### CHAPTER I

**S**IR EDWARD MORDE left his car at the top of the alley. It was raining hard. A keen November wind swept around the London Theater. The Member of Parliament for one of the suburbs dodged with surprising alacrity under the covered way which leads to the pit entrance and then turned up the astrakan collar of his coat and, holding the brim of his hat, made another dodge around to the back of the building and so to the stage door. A very stout man whose rubicund face was clean-shaven nodded. "Bad night, sir," he said.

"Exceptionally unpleasant," said Morde. "How long will Miss Okehampton be?"

The door-keeper glanced at the clock which competed with a small gas stove for the post of importance in the cubby hole. "Due now, sir," he said. "As you know, understudies 'as to wait in the theater until 'arf an hour after rise of curtain."

"I wish you'd just go down and tell Miss Okehampton that I'm waiting, will you? Otherwise, she may enter into jocular conversation with other members of the company." Half a crown glistened on the little window sill with the glass screen.

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"Oh, yes, p'r'aps it would be a good idea, sir. It's a miserable night for waiting about."

As soon as the fat man had waddled away and disappeared through swing doors, the elderly politician went, in a gingerly fashion, into the cubby hole. He took off his opera hat and examined his face earnestly in a small square looking-glass. His hair and mustache had been newly dyed that afternoon and his face very carefully massaged. It was a face of great refinement, with a thin, well-cut nose, a high forehead and well-marked eyebrows in which there was a touch of red. The chin was good, too. The mouth was hidden by what used to be known as a cavalry mustache. Like the motorist who habitually scorches and dabs oil on his number to prevent identification, Sir Edward Morde hid his mouth.

He was not altogether pleased with his appearance. It seemed to him that he looked at least six weeks older than he was. This he could not afford. He was fifty-six and he resented it.

Life had one great charm—Dick. He would give his seat in Parliament, which, even in these days, still possesses a certain social value, his club, which was incontestably the first, and half his income, which was not too large for his purpose, if only he could persuade Dick that he was worth loving, or, at any rate, pretending to love.

He left the box before its keeper returned.

"Miss Okehampton's on her way, sir. Terrible affair that in Paris."

"Oh, I don't know. I don't know why it is, but it



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seems to be the habit of journalists to apply the word terrible to everything that happens in Paris. In England such things are merely called sordid."

"Yes, but seven in family and all with their throats slit like a lot of guinea pigs. Oh, my! Very French I call it."

"Ah, at last!"

"At last? I'm only five minutes late! Oh, damn, it's raining. Oh, look here, let me out of this."

"No, no, please. It's really a liberal education to see Mascagni conduct."

"I don't think you'd better talk about liberal education after the scene in the House last night. You seem to have woken up pretty considerably, Mordy! All right, anything for a peaceful life."

Dick turned up the collar of a sealskin coat. Her curious little sealskin cap hid her golden hair. Her face was covered with a dead white liquid of some sort and her lips were very red. Over her fair eyebrows she had drawn a line with a black pencil, and there was sticky black stuff on all her eyelashes.

"I'm sorry it's so wet. The car is at the top of the court."

"Oh, that's thoughtful. If we're going, let's go. So-long, Charlie," she said to the doorkeeper, "be good, old dear."

The fat man opened the door. He watched her nip, as he called it, around the corner, followed by the elderly man who picked his way.

"Well, well," he said, "glad no daughter of mine ever thought of going on the stage."

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Dick made a long arm and put her hand into a pocket in the car. "You really are a thoughtful old thing," she said. She bent forward and powdered her nose, using the little looking-glass under the electric light.

"Not so hideously old as all that," said Morde. He took the powder puff from her and pressed it to his lips. It was a gallant but somewhat ludicrous action. The powder looked like snow upon a crow's back.

Dick threw up her heels and gave one big guffaw. "Oh, Sir Galahad!" she said. "Would that thou could see thyself as others see thee!"

"You're always so peculiarly satirical, my dear Dick."

"Oh, he's hurt. His feelings are wounded, then. Didums!"

The man twisted around and threw his arm around Dick's shoulders. "Oh, Dick! Dick!" he said, "you madden me. One kiss. Just one!"

With an eel-like action Dick slipped away and squeezed herself into the very corner of the seat. "Visitors are requested not to touch the exhibits!" she said.

"Oh, my dear——"

Dick smiled blandly, but the hand she held up was implacable. "My dear old Mordy, I like you. You're really amazingly kind and thoughtful and nice to look at, but the answer to the acrostic is, hands off. Why *can't* you leave me alone, damn it? I'm not that sort. I suppose it's a pity, but there it is."

Sir Edward Morde looked like a naughty school-boy.

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It was really almost pathetic. His voice became very soothing and gentle. "There, there, dear," he said, "I'll be very good. You shall have no further fault to find with me. Tell me, how are you getting on at the London?"

"Oh, I dunno," said Dick, "all right, I s'pose. As you're a friend of the actor-manager, they're devilish polite to me. I'm understudying Miss Woodgate, you know. Two pound ten a week, of the best. Oh, and by the way, I believe I've forgotten to thank you for working it for me."

"Well, yes, you have."

"Oh, I'm a complete Okehampton," said Dick. "However, I am particularly grateful. Believe me, your kindness is wholly appreciated." Her imitation of Morde's pedantic enunciation was exact.

The car drew up.

"They're a long time opening the door," said Dick.

"Permit me." Morde leaned forward and opened it and got out and stood in the rain in a knightly attitude.

Dick took his hand and gave a jump. "Hullo," she said, "what's this? I thought we were bound for the Coliscream? This is your house."

Sir Edward Morde smiled excitedly. "That fool of a chauffeur," he said, "always making mistakes!"

"You're a harpist," said Dick. "This is you, particularly you. Something in the nature of blighters, some of you gentlemen. However, I don't want my sealskin spotted. Perhaps you'll open the door."

Morde had expected a scene. He was delighted.

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He thrust his latch-key into the lock and threw back the door. "Enter, your Majesty," he said.

"H'm!" said Dick. "Very tricky, I don't think."

The chauffeur received an order to wait up in the garage until telephoned for, and Morde followed Dick up the stairs of his Mount Street flat to a characteristic sitting-room. It was large, airy, and its walls were covered with Flemish tapestry. The floor was polished and all the chairs upon it belonged to the same period. No glaring electric light hit the eye. The room was soothingly lighted by yellow globed electric lights hidden behind a ledge which ran high up around the walls. A cheerful fire was burning and throwing a glow upon the glistening parquet. There were cigarettes in plenty on a small table between two chairs. There were also two bottles of champagne.

"A dull evening," said Dick, throwing off her coat, "spiced with reminiscences of a bygone age."

The elderly gentleman caught the coat as it was about to fall. He held it in his arms tightly. "Oh, don't be cross," he said, "let me have one evening. I've been living for it."

Dick stood in front of the fire and held her long, thin fingers to the blaze. "Well, all I ask you is this," she said, "don't dodder. For God's sake, don't dodder."

"Dodder!—Oh, what a hideous word!" He placed the coat tenderly over the back of a chair and then went over to Dick respectfully and held out a box of cigarettes.

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"What?—Oh, well, I will. You've got my own brand, I see."

"Is there any conceivable thing between heaven and earth that I would not get for you?"

"Yes," said Dick with a short laugh, "away." She sat down with a profound sigh. "It's rather bad luck. However, I'm a bit of a philosopher, and we're out of the rain and I know 'Pagliacci' backward, and, so, there it is. You've got to do one thing for me, though."

"Only one?" The man was fatuous. "Name it."

"Doddy's for supper, old boy."

"Not really?"

"Really and truly. Otherwise Miss Okehampton summons the prancing chargers and cavorts away. One would have to be Dickens mad to spend a whole evening with old father Christmas—amuse me."

She lay back in her chair and stretched out her feet to the fire. Her stockings were silk.

Sir Edward Morde opened a bottle of champagne and filled two glasses. "I remember years ago—that is, some years ago—when I was president of the Foil Club at Oxford, I——"

## CHAPTER II

**T**ONY OKEHAMPTON had never been so happy since he went down the Cornmarket on his first night at Oxford, bought the largest tobacco jar he could find, which bore upon it the arms of his college, and placed it conspicuously in his sitting-room.

He had received the check from Thoresby, had cashed it and had secreted a thousand pounds' worth of banknotes about his bedroom at the Oxford House Mission. With that contradictory touch of extreme meanness which is often to be found in the nature of generous men, Tony intended to avail himself of his nephew's hospitality until he had chosen, furnished and moved into the new flat. Whitechapel certainly was off the map, but, thank Heaven, he could now afford as many taxicabs as he liked.

During the next few weeks his overworked nephew, who, like many another enthusiast, was busily engaged in trying to empty the sea with a fish slice, saw very little of Master Tony. He didn't appear at the early breakfast table. He let himself in long after the optimistic brotherhood had retired for the night. All his days were spent in collecting orders to view from auctioneers and estate agents, and in viewing various flats with almost finnick eyes. Tony saw no reason

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why he shouldn't face west or why he shouldn't be within a stone's throw of the park. In all probability he would join the livery brigade in the row before breakfast. He would show some of these cockney riders how to sit a gee, bless them.

He elevated flat-hunting into an orgy. Beautifully dressed and looking like the lady novelist's idea of a duke, he took West End estate agents into his confidence, and after a strenuous morning's work he turned into the Carlton or the Savoy and did himself very well. It never occurred to him to invite either of his daughters to join him on these occasions, and he was particularly careful to avoid the neighborhood of Bloomsbury. His one great hope was that Drusilla might never discover the very pleasant change in his affairs. He felt certain that her present environment was all for Drusilla's good. It would be a thousand pities to remove her from it. Eventually, after much deliberation, he decided upon a flat at Knightsbridge. Its windows overlooked the park. He considered it to be essentially a gentleman's flat. An Okehampton could live there in cheerfulness. And then he indulged himself to the full in the enjoyment of choosing furniture. He had a very nice taste and an unerring eye for those things which were really expensive. The result was altogether to his satisfaction, and when, finally, he invited Thoresby to inspect the place he personally conducted him from room to room with the modest smile of the connoisseur.

"Well, Bill? And the verdict is?"

Thoresby looked at him dryly. "I've met a few

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supremely complete aristocrats in my time," he said, "but none of 'em could come within a thousand miles of *you*."

Tony was delighted. "Thanks, so much," he said. He had begun to adopt a certain amount of Elizabethanism in his choice of words. As an artist it seemed to him to be necessary to live up to his hat.

"You have not forgotten, I suppose, to ask your furniture dealers to send their bills to me?"

"No, dear boy," said Tony. "Everything's in order."

"That's good. We little thought when we were at Quennor that accident would run us into such pleasant waters."

"Ah!" said Tony, "you're right. You know, my dear Bill, the more I think about it, and, mind you, I think about it a good deal, the more I'm perfectly certain that Providence acts in no haphazard spirit."

"You forget one thing," said Thoresby. "We're alone, old boy. Don't forget that. When two experts are together they may take a holiday from coddling. When do you come in?"

"I shall spend Sunday with my nephew and do what I can in the evening to brighten up his lands, and I shall move in on Monday. It's a good day to make a beginning. Don't you think so?"

"As good as any other. How about the girls? Have they passed the place yet?"

Tony showed surprise. "Passed the place! The girls! My dear feller, they're in the habit of doing whatever I tell them to do."



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"They were when you accompanied your parental commands with an old boot. Emancipation has set in, my dear friend. Harry and Dick may find Knightsbridge rather too far out. And, then, how about your scheme?—the decoy scheme, I mean. You see, you can't run this place on the tanner a week. You'll have to do something, won't you, to eke out your pittance?"

Tony smiled and waved his hand in an airy gesture. "I am giving my girls a bohemian luncheon here at one-thirty to-day. I shall then issue my orders and see that they make their plans for joining me at the appointed hour."

"Dick's living with Harry in Shaftesbury Avenue, isn't she?"

"Yes, a detestable little flat, chronically untidy, and smacking horribly of grease paint and stale tobacco. Faugh!"

Thorseby chuckled. This neat-minded gentleman had once lived at Quennor and had been seen with a five days' growth upon his face, with conglomerate stains all over his clothes. Wonderful thing—human nature.

"I can give you a decent glass of whisky," said Tony.

"No, thanks. I never drink between meals. An old habit of mine. It is necessary for men who live on their wits to retain clear heads. Well, then, good-bye, my dear friend, and good luck."

Having seen Thoresby to the door, Tony straightened the well-framed engravings in the hall, went into the dining-room and proceeded to arrange a cold col-

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lation upon the table. There were German sausage meats, sardines, tongues, a chicken in aspic and several bottles of white wine. It was already nearly half-past one, and so Tony mixed himself a cocktail. Glowing with satisfaction, he then turned into the drawing-room, opened a small grand piano, sat down and sang "I'll sing thee songs of Araby" in a very pleasant baritone, accompanying himself in a rather undergraduate manner. He made a delightful picture of domestic felicity. His clothes were unobtrusively excellent. His shoes were of admirable cut and his hair had been dealt with by a master hand. He was the very spit of the Tony Okehampton whom Billy Russon had expected to find standing on the steps of Quennor.

### CHAPTER III

**C**URIOSITY being just as keen in Harry and Dick as ever it was, they arrived at the parental flat together. They were only half an hour late. Both had engagements for tea, and so they were painted. Why Tony issued an invitation from a place called Park Court, Knightsbridge, beat them. Tony and Park Court, Knightsbridge, didn't mix at all.

They arrived in a borrowed motor. Harry arranged for it the night before. She hadn't the remotest idea in the morning to whom it belonged. It did very well and saved a cab fare. To see these two babies, as cool, bland and insolently collected as though they had lived in London and Paris for twenty years, was a sight for the gods. Those of them who had managed to retain some sympathy for human beings must have wept.

"You'll wait," said Harry to the chauffeur.

"I beg your pardon, miss, but——"

"Can't help your troubles, you'll wait—oh, flats. Tony must have got pally with some harmless lunatic, I suppose."

"S'pose so," said Dick. "What's the number?"

"Six."

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An attendant in a chocolate uniform with brass buttons and a German military hat came up and saluted. "What number do you——"

"Six," said Harry. She looked through him. Her expression was sulky and lowering.

"This way for the lift, miss."

"Walking," said Harry.

Dick would rather have gone by the lift, but she followed. The wide stairs were thickly carpeted and there were stereotyped pictures here and there. They stopped outside the white door of number six. Dick gave a nervous laugh. "Are we going to ask for Tony, or what's the notion? His new pal's got a bit, that's certain."

"Yes," said Harry, "ask for Tony."

"You led the way up. *You* ask."

"I *don't* think."

"Oh, well, let's chance it." She gave the bell three irritable prods.

The little difficulty was simplified by the appearance of Tony himself. "Hullo," he said.

"Hullo, Tony!" said Dick.

"Hullo, Tony!" said Harry.

Tony felt a thrill of pride at the sight of his two girls. They were distinctly guaranteed to attract attention. "Well, come in," he said.

They went in, more than ever curious. He seemed to have the run of the place. It was extraordinary.

Dick's quick brain found a solution. "Oh, I see!" she said. "You've got a job as furniture inspector for Staples."

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"Guess again," said Tony. "This is the dining-room. At a pinch you can sit a round dozen. Take special notice of the view and mark the mantelpiece—genuine Tudor."

The two girls exchanged looks and Harry tapped her forehead.

"Here we have the drawing-room, which, mark you, is a comfortable room—generally it will be improvised into a card room. Isn't it nice? Ain't it topping? God, I love it."

Harry made another sigh. It would be impossible to describe it.

"And this," said Tony, warming to his work, "is *my* den, lined, as you will see, with the immortal works of the old masters—Dickens, Thackeray, and what's the cove's name—oh, yes, George Eliot, without whom I am lost."

"Absolutely at a loose end," said Dick. "Yes, it's all very tweaky, Tony; might easily pass for the room of a Colonel of Grenadier Guards, retired. But what's the game?"

"Yes," said Harry, "that's what I want to know."

Tony's face was flushed with pride.

"Further along the passage," he said, "we have five bedrooms, bathroom and the usual offices. And, of course, there's a kitchen and so forth. Isn't it nice? Isn't it topping? God, I love it!—Inspection over, lunch. I'm afraid it's all cold. However, what there is, is good. Off with your coats. Hats, too. You're at home."

He had saved this *bonne bouche* for the last. He

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threw it at their feet like a cracker and laughed heartily.

He led the way into the dining-room, walking almost on the tips of his toes.

"Up the pole," said Harry.

Dick looked extremely puzzled and a little worried. She was very proud of her father. He was a crack shot and a superb poacher, and he had his moments when he was really amusing. It went without saying that he was clever. He was an Okehampton. She gave Tony her sealskin coat.

He weighed it and gave a long whistle. "Genuine, what? A present from the front?"

Dick shook her head. She was admiring the glass on the table. "Oh, that thing!" she said indifferently. "Ever heard of an old lady of the name of Morde?"

"Sir Edward Morde?"

"He's made a sort of hobby of me."

"You must ask him here," said Tony, "the nucleus of a circle. Now then, chicken?"

Dick examined it for a moment. "No, I hardly think so. What's that? Tongue, isn't it? No, hold it. I see you've got some potted prawns. That's my form this morning. I had supper somewhere about five." Two months ago Dick would have eaten roast mutton and plain potatoes with avidity under the shadow of the Crystal Palace.

Harry, strangely quiet, had seen, too, a bottle of sauterne. A curious look in her eye seemed to denote that she was following up a trail of thought. It made her very thirsty.

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Tony examined her out of the corners of his eyes. Once before he had seen a similar expression. He would carry a cut on his left cheekbone so long as he lived. Harry had flung an axe at him.

"Now, look here," he said, "you, too. Make hay with the lunch and ask me no further questions till I get a cigar between my teeth. Then I'll give you the news."

Harry pushed her chair back rather violently. She got up and went over to a table on which there was a cigarette box. She took one and lit it and inhaled several mouthfuls. "Tell me," she said, "you." She looked at Tony. "Were you somewhere about in the passage the night before Thoresby left Quennor?"

Tony held himself in. It was a new experience. Not so long ago his daughter's question would have been received with a salvo of the sort of blasphemy which would have made a paid Socialist tremble in his shoes. He turned deliberately to Dick. "Have some, old chap. It's pretty good. I chose it myself. When I was at Oxford I was a pretty good judge of all these things. It takes a lot to kill it, I find. What are you drinking?"

"Oh, I dunno," said Dick. "Brandy and soda."

The father shot out a short laugh. "Got civilized pretty soon, haven't you? Er—forgive me for being personal, but why plaster paint onto such a complexion as yours?"

Dick shrugged her shoulders. "Oh, I dunno. It's done, you see." She looked at her father humorously. "Can you keep this sort of thing up long?"

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"What sort of thing?"

"This gentlemanlike act—this Sir Peter Teazle business. Mind you, I don't dislike it, especially as I see you've washed and shaved and sported a clean shirt."

Tony burst out laughing. At last he had managed to catch the eye of the limelight man. He walked around the table to show himself off. "Eh?" he said. "Eh? All right, what? Savile Row, my dear. Takes a good figure to show 'em off, eh?"

Dick smiled. "Passed," she said. "H'm, and I see you're a spat man, too. Very hot. Oh, very O. T. What do you think of our father, Harry?"

Tony met Harry's half closed eyes again and twisted around. "Oh, curse the girl," he thought. "Curse her! She's a damn sight too clever!"

Harry had, however, arrived almost at the end of her train of thought. "Tony," she said, very quietly, "did you see me go in or come out?"

"I haven't the remotest notion what you mean," said Tony.

"Okehampton!" she said.

Dick was altogether in the dark. She screamed with laughter. How clever Harry was!

Tony shrugged his shoulders, but he filled up his glass and drank rather quickly.

"As a drunkard," said Harry, "you were very successful, but as a blackmailer you break all records."

Tony still held himself under control. Even he was astonished. He was, however, a very happy man whose life's work had been adequately rewarded. He



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was now all in favor of law and order. He had, as it were, a stake in the country, and he felt a sort of superstitious desire that the reunion should pass off without a hitch or anything of an undignified nature.

"What's the matter with our Harry?" he asked. "She looks like one of the witches of Endor."

Dick became a little irritable. "Oh, turn up all this mystery business, Harry," she said. "Come and sit down. Let Tony play the little gentleman for once, in peace."

Trickles of smoke were dribbling from Harry's nostrils. "I'm glad I know," she said. "That's all. There's nothing more in it than that. I've always known you for a dog, Tony, and a performing dog at that. But I thought that blackmail was one of the tricks you didn't know." She got up and marched over to her father and stood eye to eye. "I marked you once for less than this. Thank your stars, we're not at Quennor. Now then, what's the game?"

Tony looked as much relieved as he was. He began to see, much to his comfort, that his girls would be very easy to live with. "Well," he said, "the game is this. And it's a good game, played slow. You two scratch that common or garden flat in Shaftesbury Avenue and come and live with your father in a place that will reflect no discredit on the Okehamp-ton. A charming bedroom apiece, bath, hot and cold, well-trained servants to see to your every want and social evenings at home. Any little earnings of your own, of course, strictly in the light of pocket money."

Dick sprang up and threw herself in the well-known

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attitude of the stage ingénue. "Oh, papa! papa!" she cried, "how kind you are!"

"D'yer like the notion, Dick?"

"I *don't* think?" said Dick. "What ho, she *bumps!* Shaftesbury Avenue's the limit. I'm all for England, home and beauty."

Tony's joy was touching. He held out his hand. "Put it there, Dick, old man! Put it there! You're a sportsman. That's what you are, a chip of the old block, old man. That's why I called you Dick." He wrung the long thin hand and then, in his exuberance, bent forward and kissed the girl on the cheek.

"Oh, hot stuff, Tony, old boy!" said Dick. "Very hot stuff." They were the words she had used to Jack.

Harry put down an empty glass. "May I ask," she said, "how soon it will be before the police raid us?"

"My *dear* Harry!"

"Quite well done, Tony," she said, "virtuous indignation in every look and gesture. But I'm an older bird than you are in this part of the town, and in the long run houses are always raided where decoys are used to entice lunatics and old men for gambling purposes, etc., etc. However, it's all in the day's march. When do we move in?"

"On Monday," said Tony.

"All right. So-long, then. Do your best to keep your liquor off your clothes." She went out and they heard her whistling down the passage.

"I must go, too," said Dick. "I'm going to tea at the Carlton. Mother's coming here, of course?"

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Tony threw up his hands. "Ah, my dear," he said, "would God that were so! Your *poor* mother! Oh, dear, oh, dear, oh, dear! Well, *au revoir*, my dear child. I hope we shall all be very happy together."

It was with a very straight face that Dick followed her sister. When Tony heard the front door shut he walked across the room to a looking-glass and put his finger on his cheekbone. The old wound was full of pain.

## CHAPTER IV

**R**ÉNÉ DE MAINGAUCHE was the subject of some dissension in the Okehampton flat. He had been discovered by Harry. He was regarded by Harry as her particular property. It became apparent very quickly, however, that this artistic person came to Park Court for Dick. Harry was extremely annoyed. The two girls did not settle the matter as Thoresby had seen them settle another matter from his bedroom window at Quennor. Those good days were over. The walls of Harry's bedroom were, however, metaphorically hung around with broncho-buster invective.

Dick said that she liked René, and if he liked her there was an end of it. For all she cared, Harry could help herself to *her* pals. In fact, she'd be jolly glad if she could see her way to remove finnicky old Mordy, of whose doddering she was heartily tired.

This man, René de Maingauche, was a rather interesting person. He was the son of a well-known Indian prince and his mother was a French actress. His name was the outcome of a witty piece of invention on his mother's part. The son was oriental in the manner of the Boule Miche. His mother had always regarded him as an amusement. He was to

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her much as a pet dog is to many women, something to tease, to pet, to feed, to exhibit tricks. He was extremely good-looking, a really wonderful mixture of oriental and Parisian. His parental blood came out in his black hair and full lips and the curious large eyes, the whites of which were almost yellow. His mother could be traced in his exceedingly slight figure and an incurable disbelief in God and man. From both parents he inherited an insatiable desire to possess at once the last thing to take his fancy and an irritation bordering upon insanity when his desire was not gratified. Fortunately, or unfortunately—there was no happiness and solid future for such a man—desires followed so closely upon each other's heels that there was no time for him to do more than to show that insanity would really never claim him. He had always had his own way. At his own wish he had given up a French school and been sent to Harrow. At his own wish he had gone to Heidelberg rather than to an English university, and he had spent an elaborate year in India. He spoke English and German as well as he spoke French, and divided his time between Paris and London. Bored with London, having seen its plays, its music halls, its operas, he would go home to bed one night in his popular rooms in Bury Street, order a taxi and catch the night boat from Dover. At half-past seven o'clock the next evening he would meet someone in the Rue de la Paix who would get on his nerves. He would spend the evening in his mother's dressing-room at her theater, keeping her in screams of laughter, and return to

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London the following morning. Or, falling in love with a midinette, he would transplant himself from the Champs Elysées to Montmartre and live among garlic and art talk for weeks at a time. He was not so much a degenerate as a spoiled child. Given that he had had to earn his living, he could have done so excellently well. He had many gifts. He could write. He could paint, and he could sing. He did them all, but turned them to no account. There was no need. His immensely wealthy male parent had settled upon him a thousand a year and his mother frequently paid his debts. It goes without saying that he never lived within his income. He was an artist. He had no money sense. He could only live in comfort in an atmosphere. His rooms in Bury Street were crowded with caricatures by Sem, original drawings by Beardsley and Beerbohm and Seine. He had a penchant for Dulac. His favorite books were bound in covers designed by himself. His carpets were Indian and an elusive oriental smell pervaded everything. In Paris his apartment was much the same and he had duplicates of everything that he needed, so that he might never be bothered with luggage. His income was, of course, utterly inadequate. It was lucky for him that mama was one of the most highly paid actresses of France and that her own income was augmented from coffers other than those theatrical.

Among his particular friends in both countries he was nicknamed the Prince and His Highness. He was a very child of a petulantly cultivated extravagance. He had many good points. He was generous.

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It was easy. He had been known to have rescued many a starving art student from suicide. He might in the future want to buy their pictures. To be amused or startled he would pay anything, owe anything, borrow anything. And, oddly enough, underneath a skepticism which was French—the French of Paris—and an unmoral attitude toward life which was cosmopolitan, he hid a paradoxical sensitiveness as to the reason of his name. The name itself amused him. He did not in the very least object to his mother's carelessness. All the same, he would have preferred to have had a family, a history. It would have appealed to him as an artist—one who had a feeling for age and bric-a-brac and for period in furniture and silver. It was, however, nothing more than just a regret which he cultivated as a hobby. It amused him to be sorry, and there the thing ended. He discussed it in his expansive moments and speculated epigrammatically as to whom he might not have been if born in wedlock. He often gave himself the most curious parents and played the part for half an hour in the most brilliant manner of one who was, perhaps, the son of George Bernard Shaw and Mrs. Pankhurst, or Mr. Charles Hawtrey and the Duchess of Rutland, or Mr. John Burns and Baroness Von Hutten, or Mr. G. K. Chesterton and Mrs. Eddy. In fact, his imagination was very fertile. In these moments he kept odd assortments of human beings in fits of almost painful laughter. He made his table the center of attraction in the only brasserie in London which reflects anything of Continentalism. He had his moments, very few

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and far between, of the most poignant depression, but even then he was depressed in a completely artistic manner. With the calmest deliberation he would choose a foggy night and then drive to the Embankment by Cleopatra's Needle and, warmly clad in a fur overcoat, stand listening to the cold lap of an outgoing tide. These occasional fits sent him back to his super-civilization with a new zest for *diablerie*.

This was the man who had been faintly amused by Harry's sawdust blasphemies, and this was the man who at first sight of Dick found life more interesting than it had ever been before.



## CHAPTER V

**I**T happened by a series of accidents that René de Maingauche was obliged to play fox-and-grapes so far as Dick was concerned. Whenever he went to the Okehampton flat obsessed with the desire to take Dick to tea, or to dinner, or to supper, or for a run in his car, or anywhere, she was always out. At first he thought that this was cleverness on Dick's part, a well-reasoned manner of keeping him on a string. It was, at any rate, the sort of thing that Harry frequently did, and he imagined that it was characteristic of the family. It had the effect of putting him into a condition of irritability which was extremely bad for his car, his man servant and for Tony Okehampton, who was now playing the fond parent to perfection. •

One Saturday night, however, just as he was going to bed, a taxicab drove up with a note from Dick. He had never seen her great, big school-boy writing before, but he knew the Okehampton crest on the envelope. Tony had seen to it that the flat was pinked with his crest. It gave him an added springiness to his walk. The note ran in this way:

DEAR BLACK PRINCE:

I am bored stiff. If it's decent weather to-morrow, for the Lord's sake come and fetch me and drive me down to

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Brighton or somewhere. If I have much more of all the old wolves who prowl about this place I shall go fairly up the pole. Don't get here much before eleven and bring a store of extra petrol. I may cut Brighton at the last minute and take a fancy for Edinburgh. I don't care a hang if I'm not back in London till Monday night at seven o'clock.

APPLE OF TONY'S EYE.

Réné had been unable to discover anything new for at least twenty-four hours. Everything had failed him. The earth had become a stale and boring place. This letter acted upon him like electricity. This hitherto elusive, curiously cold, boyish girl with gray eyes which seemed to set him on fire and immediately put out the flame, actually handed herself to him. It was a great night. The man who needed amusement became wonderfully like his mother for at least an hour—his mother when one of her admirers had presented her with a little snake or an Australian laughing jack-ass bird. He got into his dressing-gown, a really wonderful garment, and, instead of calling his man, packed his case himself. He was going on a honeymoon. If the shops had been open, he would have gone forth and bought elaborate new brushes, although his collection of them was already remarkable, and set himself up with another collection of new ties. As it was, he contented himself with old things which he had never worn, and while he packed them he sang: "*Je suis le roi d'Espagne, jeune fille aux yeux novis.*"

The infantry captain whose rooms were just beneath, and who was sitting up with a wet towel around his

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head, endeavoring to force into it some of the ingenious twaddle which is set by the war office for those British officers who desire to pass into the Staff College, heard pæans of laughter, and he relegated the lunatic Frenchman to several undiscovered spots. It seemed to him that the man above was entertaining a party of devils. The ceiling shook as though an enormous Mordkin were dancing, and, just as he was about to overcome his characteristically insular hatred for making a scene, dash upstairs and hammer at the offending door, the room above seemed to empty, whereupon the infantry captain gave thanks to all his gods and returned doggedly to his acrostics. He did not know René de Maingauche. At half-past two someone started playing the piano. It was not a devil this time. It was an angel. Curiously enough, the infantry captain had been born with an ear for music, which proved beyond all question that he should not have been born to be an infantry captain. His mind was lifted out of geographical absurdities and comforted by delicious bits of Grieg and Chopin and Heller's "Sleepless Nights." It was with a sigh of regret that he heard the piano close with a bang.

Réné drove up to Park Court just as the barracks clock struck eleven. The door was opened by a neat maid.

"Is Miss Dick up?"

"No, sir. Will you please come this way?"

Réné heard Tony's unmistakable laugh. His nostrils caught the aroma of a good cigar. When he went into the little room lined with old masters he

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found three men comfortably seated discussing Home Rule and other modern Gilbertianisms.

"Ah!" said Tony, rising with his usual flamboyance. "This is delightful. Come in, my dear fellow, come in. Let me see, now, you know my two old friends here, don't you?"

"I know Sir Galahad Morde," said René, who took it that they were two of the wolves to whom Dick had referred.

"Oh, well, dash it. It's about time you knew my dear old friend, Lord Thoresby—Mr. René de Main-gauche."

Thoresby, sparkling with cleanliness, who now looked horsy rather in the manner of the M. F. H. than the trainer, nodded. He liked the look of the Frenchman. Sir Edward Morde, neat, precise, and old maidish, shot a jealous glance at the newcomer. He had no imagination, but he felt convinced that this ridiculously young, slight and well-turned-out person was now after Dick and had deposed Harry from his affections.

Here were three totally distinct men who had come to the same place for the same reason and all by appointment. Unknown to each other, they belonged to the brotherhood of Dick. Thoresby was to take Dick to skate at Holland Park at her request. Sir Edward Morde had been booked by Dick to initiate her into the chilly joys of the Church Parade, to be followed by luncheon at the Carlton, while René had been booked by her for a trip to Heaven.

Tony was the only one who appreciated the delicious

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comedy of the situation. He guessed at once what had happened. He did not persuade himself that the three men had come to Park Court to talk to him. He saw in them Dick's changing moods. She had obviously asked Thoresby in one of them, Morde in another and the Frenchman in a third. He bet himself a tenner that the Frenchman would lead her away. His impishness led him to tease the three men. It was a splendid way of putting in a Sunday morning. "You didn't meet Dick going away, I suppose?" he asked.

There was a simultaneous "What!"

And in this way Tony managed to let the three men know that they were all there for the same purpose.

"I had a notion," he said, "that she was off to the Oratory to hear the music with some nice boy or other. Perhaps, I'm wrong."

"Dear me," said Morde, "I really wish you'd find out."

Tony went to the door and made loud bovine sounds. Dick's voice came down the passage. "Oh, shut up, Tony!"

And so Morde smiled and Thoresby and René eyed him with enmity.

"Oh, bless my soul!" said Tony. "What am I talkin' about? I'm takin' Dick down to lunch with her aunt or cousin or whatever she is."

"I don't think so," said Thoresby.

"I'm quite sure you're not," said René.

"And I am equally certain," said Morde, "that you are slightly inaccurate, my dear Okehampton. I speak

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thus definitely, because Miss Dick is under an old standing engagement with me for to-day."

"Oh, charming!" said Tony.

"Some mistake, somewhere," said Thoresby. "I'm takin' Dick skatin'."

"Oh, delightful," said Tony.

If he had been in his father's country, René would have had these three men neatly tortured. As it was, he flicked his cigarette into the fire and spoke very softly, almost with a purr. "My car is waiting below," he said, "to run Dick down to Brighton."

"Oh, toppin'," said Tony. So long as Dick remained at Park Court there was no need to be nervous as to its popularity. And then, inwardly immensely tickled at the undisguised antagonism of his three uninvited guests, Tony talked, and talked extremely well. It was not so much remarkable as peculiarly characteristic that this man had climbed out of the slough in which he had wallowed, pig-like, for so many years and now stood cleaned and spruced far above it. Outwardly he was now the old Tony Okehampton grown older. He talked until Dick made her appearance in a tube-like black skirt, a black coat with very tight sleeves and a new set of fox furs. Two small heads with beady eyes made a pillow for her chin, and her oval face, thickly coated with white stuff, looked whiter than ever. Her little hat was very French and chic and possessed one feather, which would inevitably poke people in the eyes whenever she turned. She was utterly cool and blasé, a complete woman of the world—her world.

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"Hullo, Mordy," she drawled. "Hullo, Bill! Hullo, B. P. Come to hear about the state of the Constitution from our friend Tony?"

All three men rose at once and talked together. Tony had the greatest difficulty in preventing himself from letting out a series of roars. He was tremendously hearty these days. Prosperity sat well upon him. These were not the only men who kept him entertained. There were Harry's friends. There was the son of a short time deceased West End tradesman, who, having made an enormous fortune by the sweat of his brain, left it behind him to be dissipated by a reckless, degenerate son. There was a man whose services in the British Army had been dispensed with and who went through more adventures in the heart of London than the Deerslayer ever overcame in his virgin forests. He was an aristocrat in every sense of the word. In addition to these two there was a small collection of young men who were supposed to be reading for various professions and who devoted all their time to an indefatigable study of what is called life. So Tony got as much bridge, baccarat, poker and other games of chance, including tossing, as he could do with. It was very profitable. He argued, and perhaps rightly, that he was a more deserving object and a better collector of coins than bookmakers *at hoc genus omne*.

Dick immediately put an end to all argument. "Come on, B. P.," she said, "come on. This is as bad as the monkey house at the zoo." She turned at the door. "There are hundreds of other Sundays,



**"She was utterly cool and blasé."**





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Bill dear, and Mordy darling," and threw them each a little smile.

Réné de Maingauche followed her into the lift with gleaming teeth. At that moment he was the very spit of his father.

## CHAPTER VI

**T**HE victor kept his car running on the low gear for several moments. He was waiting to be told which way to go. Dick said nothing. She sat hunched up with her hands thrust deep into her pockets. She was in a very odd mood.

"Well?" asked René.

"Well, what?"

"Your letter said Brighton or Edinburgh. Which is it to be?"

"Does it matter?"

"Somewhat. You've brought nothing with you."

Dick looked a little puzzled. "I don't want anything," she said. "What do you mean?"

"It's all the same to me. Edinburgh sounds rather harsh. Suppose we make it Brighton,"

"All I ask you to do," said Dick, "is to make it something, and make it something quick."

"Then, Brighton," said René, in the highest spirits, "Brighton and a silver sea."

Away went the car. So long as the roads were lined with houses René constrained himself just within the windy side of the law, but when at last he shook off the abortive mass of houses in and around Croy-

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don and ran into the open country he gave the car her head, utterly careless of police traps. The roads were hard. It had been frosty for several days, and there was a faint touch of sun in the crisp air, which gave the trees, all bare against the sky, a less melancholy appearance. Through the suburbs and their ever-spreading tentacles Dick remained monosyllabic. She paid very little attention to René's well-turned phrases. He might have been a chauffeur more garrulous than his kind usually is. This attitude amused the Frenchman very much. It was something new, and therefore something to be welcomed. It was the first time that Dick had ever condescended to go anywhere with him alone. He persuaded himself that, having made the plunge, and having invited herself into his arms, she was in a delightful flutter of nerves.

The man was hopelessly mistaken. Dick had been to supper the night before with a large party. She was in her most reckless mood—a mood in which she threw rolls at distant acquaintances and conducted the band with a fork. For the most part the music had confined itself to selections, to the jingling reminiscent stuff of musical comedies. But without rhyme or reason the conductor suddenly took it into his head to play a little old song of Sullivan's. It wound its way around Dick's untouched heart. It gave her an overwhelming feeling of homesickness. It made her want to creep away, find her mother—the mother whom she remembered as a bright and charming woman—and lie in her arms. When the simple mel-

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ody came to an end she got up without a word and left the place and went home. On the table in the hall there was a letter from Jack. It was just as simple and just as sincere and just as full of an undercurrent of feeling as the song had been and wound up, "Believe me, dear Dick, always your old pal." Dick waited until the flat cleared. Then she stalked in to her father, who was singing to himself. She said: "Look here, Tony, mother's got to come here. If she doesn't, I sling my hook and there's an end of it. Why should we live here in luxury, while mother's buried away in that dismal hole at Bloomsbury? Harry and I have done what you asked us, and not let her know anything about this place. When I write, which isn't often, I write from the theater. I don't think Harry ever troubles herself. And I want mother here, d'ye see? Is that clear?"

If there was one person on earth whom Tony did not want under his new roof she was his wife. He knew Dick. He knew that if he diplomatized, the desire for her mother would pass. So he said several nice things, agreed with Dick that her mother should come to the flat, and went off to bed, where he dismissed the whole thing from his mind.

He was very nearly right. Dick cried badly for several hours, called herself, Harry and her father by all sorts of names and underwent a sort of agony of pain and regret. In the morning she woke up with a headache, wondered what in the world it had been to cause her to be such a fool as to cry, and thanked Heaven that she had sent a note to René. Neverthe-

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less, something of her emotion remained. She had read Jack's letter again. It made everything that she was doing seem horribly stale and tasteless. He was doing things and was so clean.

Once a chameleon, always a chameleon. By the time the car came to the straight street of Crawley, with the Rising Sun at one end and the Setting Sun at the other, the cold air had brushed all her cobwebs away. She began to feel hungry, became aware that René was saying amusing things, that he drove well, and was very good-looking. She remembered also that she and Harry had quarreled about this man, and that in a sort of way she had won his scalp. Also, it came to her that this odd Frenchman who was not French, this Indian who was not an Indian, this mere boy who spoke three languages like a native and made his way through life like a sort of meteor was much talked about. He was His Highness and the Prince to all her set. When he chose he could talk with something of the poetry of the oriental. He appealed to Dick from every point of view, more because he was cosmopolitan than because he could do her well. Unlike Harry, she was not greedy and was quite prepared at any time to eat bread and cheese so long as it was served up with laughter.

Out of Crawley a man in uniform who leaned on the saddle of his bicycle made a signal to René. His warning was understood and attended to. The car slowed down to average speed.

"Hullo!" said Dick. "Funky?"

"No. But after all I own a car, and I may as well

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be able to drive it when I want to. If my license is indorsed again, it may be suspended altogether. See my point?"

"Have it suspended!" said Dick. "What a spree! I'd simply love to have a car that I couldn't drive. I'd lend it out and be a passenger. It 'ud break the monotony a bit."

Réné laughed. He had always thought that this girl was worth cultivating.

During the remainder of the run he did his best, like a tennis player, to serve Dick with something which she couldn't answer. A very rally of wits was kept up, and when finally the car stopped in front of the hotel at which they were to lunch Réné handed out a girl in whose eyes there was nothing but laughter.

Dick knew the place well. Many of her Sundays had been spent there either with Thoresby or Morde. She passed into the lounge—already crowded with people who had left the dining-room, a heterogeneous collection of Jew and Gentile, nearly all of whom were notorious for some reason or another—with the quiet air of an habitué, nodding here and there.

With a feeling of excitement which Réné had not known for a considerable time, he went into the clerk's office and booked a small suite on the second floor, writing in the book the names of Mr. and Mrs. Ernest William Brownsmith, the sight of which sent the more precocious of the clerks into an irrepressible fit of laughter. The Prince was an old customer. When Réné joined Dick in the foyer, which was indeed al-

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most a green-room, he was well pleased with himself and the world. The old fable of the fox and the grapes, of which he had hitherto felt himself to be the hero, no longer applied.

The dining-room had many empty tables. It was after two o'clock. The band was still playing and the loud chatter and laughter, the warmth of the room and the smell of cigarette smoke were not unpleasant. An obsequious man conducted His Highness to a table in one of the windows at which a jockey, a musical comedy star, a negro fighting man and a much-advertised aeronaut had just been lunching. The Brighton front was more or less deserted. Occasional motors skimmed by and every now and then a small party of cockney scorchers crouching over the low handle-bars of their bicycles made the luxury of the hotel even more apparent to Dick. A muddy-looking sea lapped quietly around the framework of the West Pier.

Dick found the Black Prince a very lively companion. When he did not know the actual names and histories of the people at the other tables he invented them. His inventions were nearer the truth than the truth. He ordered the most expensive things on the *ménu* and two bottles of *Veuve Clicquot* o.6. He did not treat Dick as though he had known her all her life. This was the sort of thing that other people did. He paid her a sort of insolent deference because he knew that it would be new to her, and he had already discovered that, as in his own case, Dick had no use for anything that was not new. With a wave of his



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hand he left it to Dick to make a suggestion as to how to kill the afternoon. "You are so original," he said. "I cannot compete."

Dick's gesture was entirely characteristic. "Let's go down under the front and play skittles."

The Black Prince was charmed. He had never played skittles and had never been under the front and so, after having smoked among the birds and beasts in the conservatory, they went forth. A good deal to his annoyance—Réné had an altogether oriental dislike of plebeians—the skittle alley was in possession of a young peer and his satellites, most of whom were painted, and who called each other dear and darling, and who rolled the ball like unathletic girls. However, Dick intended to play and achieved her object in a manner which would have given complete joy to Napoleon. She watched the lame efforts of these well-known Londoners for a quarter of an hour and then addressed herself to the man in charge. "I will now play," she said. "These people have had enough." Whereupon she gave the astonished crew an exhibition of skittle playing which filled them with admiration and entirely removed their annoyance. She returned to the hotel in time for tea with a nicely replenished purse. She had only played for a sovereign a game. The band was playing in the conservatory and many respectable Brightonians had come to see the sight. Getting no answer to his question as to whether they should run the car out before dinner, Réné turned in his chair to look at Dick and found that she had deliberately gone to sleep.

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The Black Prince chuckled. Here was a character. Here was a very queen who made use of him when it pleased her and forgot his presence in a manner that was wholly royal. He watched her as he smoked. He decided that to be able to sleep through such a noise was a gift, and he found her as she sat in a large low cane chair, with one leg crossed over the other, her long thin hands clasped together in her lap and her head pillowed in her furs, a perfectly adorable person. No midinette, no freak French actress, no ignorant, chattering chorus girl with a Christmas card face had ever fired him as this girl did. How paradoxical was life. Here was he, ready to undergo humiliation, to deprive himself of personal comfort, even to wait for months, to add Dick to his long list of pleasant memories, and she had quietly saved him time, trouble and expense.

Dick slept for an hour without moving, and almost without moving René watched her. The band left the place and by twos and threes the menagerie departed. Curious little love birds ceased to feed and made their unmusical conversation. They gathered together in their cages and sat wing to wing all along the perches, making spots of bright colors. Some of them with their parrot-like beaks bore a close resemblance to many of the people who had motored down for a few hours. The place was full of the smell of patchouli and Egyptian cigarettes.

And all this hour there was a smile on Dick's lips. She and Jack were tramping through the woods around Quennor, almost knee deep in the dead dry

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leaves, which made a sound like pebbles being washed up by the sea. "Hurrah for the ginger beer!" she said, and awoke.

Réné bent forward. "Ginger beer on top of tea?" he said. "Never!"

Dick eyed the man with the hungry eyes for a long moment. "Oh, it's you," she said. "I expected to see Jack."

"Jack? *Qui diable*——?"

"Never mind. Now, then, what's to do? Any ideas?" She got up and stretched herself and yawned and put her hat straight and kicked a footstool out of the way.

"Come upstairs," said Réné. "There's a piano in the suite. I'll play to you."

"Very brainy," said Dick. "Do all Black Princes take suites?"

They went up in the lift. The sitting-room, with its peculiar hotel furniture, was very warm. There was a blazing fire. The valet had unpacked Réné's case. There was a cigar box on the table and a box of chocolates tied with blue ribbon. The door of the next room was open and a pair of blue silk pajamas was lying primly on the bed.

Dick drew a chair up to the fire and captured the chocolates.

"Give her ten," she said.

So Réné sat himself at the piano and played Tschaikowsky and Dvorak and some of Liszt's least Maiden's Prayer-ish pieces. He played until the windows seemed to be hung with black velvet. The only

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light in the room was the flicker of the fire. Then suddenly breaking off in the middle of Mendelssohn's "Bee's Wedding," he got up and said: "*Cristo Santo Dio! Je mangerai ta chair blanche!*"

"That's all right!" said Dick, "sounds well, but this is where we stand up, old boy, and turn on the full blaze of light."

"No, no!" said René. "Let us remain as we are!" He tried to kiss her.

Dick put her hand around his throat and hurled him backward, made an eel-like dart across the room and turned on the light.

The Black Prince looked somewhat undignified. He got up slowly, lit a cigarette and stood with his back to the fire. He said: "Er, may I ask why you have done me the honor to come to Brighton?"

"Pure kindness of heart," said Dick, "and also because I thought your car wanted a little exercise. Why, what's the trouble?"

"The trouble is, if I may be allowed to say so, that I am not very keen on being violently assaulted. It doesn't suit me."

"Hullo!" said Dick. "Lost your hair?" She threw a chocolate at him.

René recovered himself. After all, this was only another surprise. The day was still young according to his calculations. "I think we'll dine early, don't you?"

"I'm cutting dinner," said Dick.

"Oh? Why?"

"I feel like it. But don't let that worry you. You're

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staying here, I see. Good-night. Thanks very much for a pleasant day. There's just time for me to catch the express to Victoria. So-long, B. P."

And before the phrase-maker could find a single word; he heard his door bang.

## CHAPTER VII

**T**ONY waited up for Dick that night. It was a curious thing that, although this man cared nothing for what became of Harry, he devoted many secret hours to genuinely anxious consideration for Dick. This was all the more curious because he was afraid of Dick. Under her straight eyes he felt like a criminal who sees a detective. Her frankness made him shudder, and yet, next to himself, Dick was the only person for whom he had any love. She laughed and was cheery and he admired the grit she showed in sticking to her work. In her shoes he knew that he would not have put himself out in the least or permitted himself to be put out for one moment by the rules and regulations of the theater. He went so far even as to tell himself—certainly it was after a particularly drunken night—that he could be very happy in three outlandish rooms in the wastes of North Kensington or Hammersmith with Dick. He would get his little excitement in seeing her to the theater and kill her working hours by watching the moving pictures in cinematograph shows with a pipe between his lips. She could always earn enough money to keep him in good tobacco and the daily papers.

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He knew the reputation of René de Maingauche. He knew precisely why this man and the others came to the flat. It happened that he was spending his Sunday evening alone. It was with an immense sense of relief that he heard the front door open, heard Dick's unmistakable step in the passage and put the *Referee* aside when she opened his door and gave him her invariable greeting.

"Hullo, Tony!"

"Hullo, old girl! Back early, aren't you?"

"Yes, I suppose I am."

"How's Brighton?"

"Just Brighton."

"Motor back?"

"No. Train."

"Why?"

"Oh, I dunno. Hadn't been in a train for some time. Thought I'd try it. Not a bad old way of getting back."

"Oh—did His Highness smash up his car?"

"Not while I was in it. Very likely has by now."

"Hullo, you two have had a row!"

"Lord, no. He doesn't know Miss Okehampton, that's all—cheery cove. Great fun." She lit a cigarette. "If he'd been properly birched in his youth and had never had more pocket money than a shillin' a week he'd be a Pierrot, or something, by this time. One of Pallissier's lot, earning good money. Or he might even have written a toppin' novel or two. However, there it is. It isn't my business. I like him, and he's useful. Good-night, Tony."

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She hesitated for a moment at the door and then turned. "I say, did you intend to sit up for me?"

"Yes. Why not?"

"I dunno. You sit up for me a good bit, don't you?"

"Yes. Why not?"

"Oh, I dunno."

She opened the door again and again hesitated. These two were more like undergraduates in the same rooms than father and daughter. They were friendly in the same inarticulate manner. She turned again and flicked something with her finger. "Look here, don't bother to sit up for me if you'd rather not."

"Oh, that's all right, old girl."

"Yes, I know. It's all right—so far. When it isn't all right I'll tell you."

"How?"

She picked up a book and hunted through it for illustrations. "You needn't sit up for me till I fall in love. Then I'd like you to. I mean, then it'll be—useful. Good-night, Tony."

For the third time she hesitated. When she turned again she crossed the room to the fireplace, ostensibly to look at a picture which had always hung there. It was rather a nice copy of Dicksee's "Last Furrow." "H'm! I love it. Jolly well touched in. Well, good-night, Tony." She bent down suddenly and kissed him on the head. "I like sportsmen."

For a moment or two, when he was alone again, Tony couldn't see to read. "Good old Dick," he said to himself. "Good old Dick."



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It was with the warmth of this unaccustomed feeling upon him that Tony started out the following morning upon a search. He felt that he wanted to mark the occasion in some way or other. He wanted to find some odd and unusual trinket that Dick might wear and laugh at. He would call it a Christmas present, so that she might not think he was chumming up to her for any particular reason. The frost still held and the mist of the morning gave way and allowed the elusive December sun to be seen. In all the glory of good clothes and a bowler hat, specially designed for him, Tony swung through Knightsbridge along to Hyde Park Corner, down the hill to Piccadilly Circus. He told himself that Wardour Street might be a likely spot. He found that he was wrong. So he poked about the Holborn end of Oxford Street, eying the things in the windows of curiosity shops and others.

A woman, dressed out of the fashion, whose face was hidden by a thick veil, slipped out of a chemist's shop, caught sight of Tony, drew up, eyed him with the very essence of sardonic animosity, and when he moved on sidled after him, taking good care not to be seen.

It was Mrs. Tony, who had escaped from the vigilance of her strong-minded relative. She had only seen her husband once since the break-up at Quennor. This was during his first week at the Oxford House Mission. He called at Bloomsbury Square, not to see her, but to borrow three and sixpence from the warlike lady who struggled with policemen in Palace

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Yard. "If you please!" she said to herself, "*Quel miracle!* Where the reach-me-down suit? Where the cheap bow tie? Where the ready-made blacking boots? And where, oh where, the gutter-searching eye?—Dear Drusilla, this day may bring an epoch-making change in your life. Who can tell?"

The unsuspecting Tony, upon whom peace and prosperity were acting so well, and who for the first time for uncountable years was thinking of someone other than himself, wandered on, followed by poor dear Drusilla, from whom he had kept his good news a secret wholly for her own sake. When he stopped, she stopped. When he peered into one window, she peered into another.

Finally, when he found something, went in, made his purchase and, coming out, jumped into a taxicab, she jumped into another.

"Follow that cab," she said, "and when it stops draw up behind it. You shall be well paid."

Tony had hardly got into his own room when the servant came in.

"A lady to see you, sir."

"To see me?"

"'Mr. Okehampton,' she said, sir."

"Give any name?"

"'A friend of the family,' she said, sir. 'An old and dear friend.'"

"An old and dear friend of the family! Didn't know there was one!—B'Jove, it's Dick, spoofin'."

He watched the door with a broad smile upon his almost rejuvenated face. Dick was up to one of her

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games, of course. He would pretend not to know her. She liked sportsmen, she said.

The servant showed in a woman who quietly raised her veil, showed a pale face and two eyes full of venom. "Nice weather for the ducks, I *don't* think!" she said, with almost pedantic enunciation. "You have certainly provided me with a beautiful home, Tony dear."

## CHAPTER VIII

**D**ICK had just returned from an understudy rehearsal. She was in her bedroom. Harry was there in a scarlet dressing-gown. She was putting Dick up to date with certain of her adventures. Both girls suddenly heard a sound which not only took them to their feet but along the passage and into Tony's room.

Harry, whose quick intimacy with the peculiarities of life had given her some knowledge of apoplexy, expected to see her father stretched out upon the floor. Instead, she found him standing with his mouth open, having just emitted a cry, wearing an expression of fear, horror, rage and a sort of annoyance which can be assisted by no known adjective.

The two girls expected to see him looking either at the spirit of some old friend who had been masterfully done by Tony in the past or a Sinc-like animal with three heads and thirteen hands and an eye in the middle of its back—a green, slithery beast twitching constantly.

They found a quiet, pale-faced woman, with venom in her eyes and an odd smile playing around her lips.

"Mother!" said Harry. "Oh——!"

Dick stood still. Something seemed to prevent her from moving or speaking.

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Tony was obviously relieved. The presence of his two girls set his tongue wagging with a sort of courage.

"She's found us!" he cried hoarsely. "She's found us! My God! What are we going to do? Don't let her stay. Tell her she's not to stay." He threw out his hands toward his girls appealingly.

They were both silent. Harry was altogether indifferent, Dick filled with compassion for both her parents.

Mrs. Tony smiled at them. "Well, my darlings?" she said. "Well, my pretty babies? Answer oo's dear papa!"

But they had nothing to say. Dick was trembling horribly.

Tony broke out again. He was like a man face to face with a line of pointing rifles pleading wildly for his life. "Side with me!" he said. "Think a little of your old father, who's done so much for you, who's given you this beautiful home and made things easy. Without that woman I've become a gentleman again. I've gone off the drink. I've pulled myself up. For God's sake, don't let her stay and drag me under again. She did it before and she'll do it again! She hates me. She's a devil. Dick! Harry! Side with me, if I never ask you to do anything for me again. Save me from this woman! If you don't believe what I tell you, look at her eyes, quick!"

The poor wretch was shaking from head to foot. He was in an ague of fear.

"Isn't he funny?" said Mrs. Tony. "Isn't oo's papa

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a queerly amusing person? Aren't you surprised that I'm not angry at his treating his sweetheart in such a way? *Que de choses nous autres femmes subissent des hommes!*"

The girls said nothing. Harry had become interested in her father's condition. Dick realized for the first time that what Tony said was true.

Tony sidled around the table and clutched Dick's hand. "Dick!" he cried, "Dick! You're my pal. You understand me. You've seen me clean and spruce. You've seen what I've made myself when left alone. Ask her to go! Ask her to have mercy on me! Help me to go on being a gentleman! I like it. She's an octopus. She'll clutch at me again. She did it before. She undermined Quennor. She dragged me into Hell in the very first year of our married life. Everyone had called me 'Dear old Tony—white man.' She was jealous. She couldn't stand it. With the cunning of a thousand devils she spotted me with mud. She encouraged all the rottenness in me. You don't know. Nobody knows. But I tell you that if she stays here, I shall go under again. Dick! Dick! be my friend! Stand by me! I'll give her every farthing I've got if she'll let me off. I'll go and work if only she'll go away. Harry don't care, not a damn! But you do, Dick. You do. You understand me. You've seen me both ways. You *know* that I can be a gentleman, don't you? Dicky, say something!"

All through this stammering appeal Dick had stood very stiff and white. At the end of it she gently released herself from her father's clutch, went over to

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her mother and put her arm around her shoulder. "Hullo! mother," she said.

"Good-morning, darling Dick. What a very becoming frock!"

"Dick! Dick!" cried Tony, "don't go back on me!"

Dick held her mother tight. She had needed her. She had thought of her often in the scimmagy house of the suffragist. "Let's go, mother," she said. "We can take rooms somewhere."

"My sweet, unpractical pet," said Mrs. Tony.

"Dick! Dick! I'm your pal."

Dick drew the back of her hand across her forehead. "Well, what's to be done?" she asked. "Don't let's go through all that Quennor business again. I'm ready enough to do something. Let's leave Tony in peace. He's been so beastly happy. Poor devil, he needed it."

"That's right, Dick. That's right. Stick by me. I'll never forget yer!"

The struggle seemed to amuse Harry. She wore the expression of those who watch prize-fights.

"Other husbands and wives don't get on," said Dick, "why should you? I shall earn more money presently. There are other flats in London, y'know. Come on, mother. Let's get."

Tony shot out his hands. "Oh, Dick!" he cried. "You ain't goin' to leave me? Who am I to sit up for if you go?"

Dick became angry. "Dash my buttons!" she said. "You can't have it both ways. Mother's got a perfect right to live here if she likes. Either she stays

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here with all of us or she goes away with me."

Tony put his hands over his face. "I wish I was dead," he said. And then Mrs. Tony's silky voice came in again. "Of course all this is very dramatic, typically Okehampton. The church and the law have made it necessary for me to share my husband's roof. Quaintly enough, my own inclination bears them out. Of course, darling—yes, that *is* a becoming frock. I *quite* appreciate your bravery and self-sacrifice. How selfish I should be to lift you out of this refined atmosphere!"

"What are you going to do, mother? That's the point."

"Oh, God, I wish I was dead!" cried Tony.

Harry laughed.

"Stay here, darling, and be a comfort to your father," said Mrs. Tony. "Help him in his exemplary guardianship of our beautiful gels and, incidentally, enjoy with him the fruits of his industry. One of these fine evenings, Tony dear, when, like Darby and Joan, you and I sit by the fireside, you will tell me how you came by all this luxury, will you not?"

"Oh, God!" said Tony. "I wish I was dead."



## CHAPTER IX

**W**HEN Drusilla sailed out of the room to inspect the flat, with her arm through Dick's, Tony waited until Harry was not looking at him and slipped away. Quickly and furtively he put on his overcoat and hat, induced an umbrella to come silently out of a stick stand, opened the door with his latchkey and hurried away. The marks of his tears were still on his face and he was uncertain on his feet, like a man who has just escaped an appalling accident. He turned into the park, which was almost deserted. It wore its out-of-season melancholy. The green chairs were piled together. Ugly skylines could be seen through leafless branches and the once blazing beds were dull and empty. The place suited Tony's mood. He felt that he, too, had been flung forward into the winter of his life.

He walked about for several hours aimlessly, asking himself what he was going to do. His fear of Drusilla was not a pose. He did genuinely believe that she was a devil and he had every reason to do so.

It was a curious story altogether. Tony was a marrying man. He gave out that he was a marrying man. He had been known to say with his back to the fireplace of someone's rooms at Oxford that he should

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go in for marriage as he had been in for everything else—with all his heart and soul. It should be the beginning of a new career, a new and wonderful career, to be, God willing, highly blessed. Susceptible enough, he had never been bowled completely. He was looking out for a rather small girl, tailor-made, who could wear a short skirt unobtrusively, and nails in her shoes without advertising them, who could stump across country at his side, making precious small work of stiles; who, if she shed hairpins at all, shed them secretly, and who could make a dog understand her with not more than two words. He looked for a girl with white teeth, who was not always smiling, who astonished you with her femininity when in evening clothes, to whom children went instinctively, and who, if she liked, could make a piano sing; (a girl who was dead honest and who would not hesitate to speak like a man and a friend if ever it became necessary.) In a word, a girl to live up to and play the game for.

And he married Drusilla. Not more to the amazement of his friends than of himself, he married Drusilla. It was said, of course, that she married him. So she did. She had no love for him. He was just the gayest, best-looking, most popular man in the place and she married him so that someone else might not. That was Drusilla from end to end. She was the only child of an old family which had intermarried for two generations. She was just as near insanity as it was possible to be without touching it. Her Rossetti face with its sensual lips, her wide set bovine eyes, her

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red dry hair, which, when let down, stuck out fuzily, and her long, rather loose limbs, all put her in the somewhat doubtful category of picturesque women. In every way she differed utterly from Tony's not very difficult ideal. Her family were glad enough to get rid of her and had the grace to pity her husband. They knew her for the devil that she was. They had suffered from all the Machiavellian twists of her brain. They knew her cunning, her cruelty, her genius for lying and misrepresentation. They more than suspected the degeneracy of her habits. To find her chair empty at their table was a relief too infinite for words—a relief which spread through the house, up and down stairs, and out into the stables. The very animals on the place breathed freely and cats curled themselves up on hearth rugs in broad daylight.

And this was the woman who was permitted by the cowardice of doctors and scientists to marry, and to marry Tony.

The peculiar kink of her mind for which she was not responsible was to destroy. She delighted in pulling things to bits, in beheading beetles, amputating frogs, unwinging butterflies and stripping the petals off growing roses. With what relish she took Tony in hand! Here, according to popular report, was a very nearly perfect man, a man whom men called white, who came under her ægis as "dear old Tony." How much better he was than a mere butterfly or one of a large family of frogs! She began to put him under treatment from the very moment that they drove away together through the cheering crowd of

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friends. In the first ten minutes of the honeymoon journey she injected her poison into him. It was all very cunningly done—painlessly, insidiously. She knew herself to be the last bead on a long string of beads, half of which were faulty. She knew that she was mentally and physically degenerate. Here was a sort of prize specimen of a man, strong, honest, muscular, well trained, well satisfied. She was deadly jealous of all this. She detested in him those qualities which she had never possessed, through no fault of her own. How nice, how supremely comforting to revenge herself upon this man, gradually to undermine him, gradually and gradually to see him totter, tumble and collapse!

Tony was like putty in her deft fingers. Like most good-natured men, he was weak. Like nearly all men, he was chameleonic. Lead him into a cathedral and he would be put in touch with God. Put him among swine and he would become Gadarean in his swinishness. Not, of course, at once, but gradually and gradually. No inhuman foul creature whose life is devoted to carrying plague germs from place to place ever did its work better or with more gleeful enjoyment than did Drusilla. She had Tony pinned like a great moth to a cardboard. She led him gradually into drinking habits, into slovenliness of mind and person. She goaded him into blasphemies and teased him into violence. Like a vampire, she sucked all his good qualities away and finally deserted him for other pursuits as no longer able to supply her with any amusement.

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No wonder that the regenerated Tony, or at any rate, the as much as possible regenerated Tony, trembled under her eye, in which he saw once more the old look. No wonder he deserted his house, and as he paced aimlessly about asked himself what he was to do. Again and again he repeated to himself the words he had used to Dick. "I am a gentleman, a gentleman." He was proud of himself once more. He was clean and smart. Decent thoughts were struggling through the nettles in his brain like little flowers. A desire to love and be loved returned. Even the desire to put himself out for someone else. The uncomfortable faculty of facing the truth was stirring once more. He was beginning, just dimly beginning, to be afraid to realize the hideousness of his deal with Thoresby. He was glad of it, although at present he was not yet convalescent enough to take any steps, and it was at this moment that Providence had seen fit to put this devil back into his life. "Oh, it's hard, it's hard!" he whimpered. "Oh, damn it! It's hard! I can escape, and I'm thankful enough for that. But she takes Dick from me, and what'll she do to Dick? Oh—what'll she do to Dick?"

## PART IV

### CHAPTER I

**T**HERE had been a series of failures at the London Theater. It puzzled people. It was a new and charming theater, even more comfortable, if possible, than the successful variety theaters, and it was small and compact. It was properly warmed in cold weather and had no cutting drafts which punished people for buying stalls. It was not buried away in back streets which reeked with garlic and were strewn with pieces of orange peel, and into which taxicabs came reluctantly, many of them in a spirit of adventure. It was, therefore, unlike every other theater in London except those devoted to musical plays and one or two old favorites. It seemed almost unbelievable that under the management of a young actor-manager it should have acquired the reputation of an unlucky house.

Dick had been in the theater for nine months. She had understudied and played small parts in five productions. It was almost a record, even for London, where the running of theaters is not a business. These five plays had come from the pens of well-known dramatists. They had been elaborately put on and

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expensively cast. They had been immediate failures and the reason was obvious to everyone except the young actor-manager, who devoted all his spare time to cursing the British public.

Dick's shrewd eye saw what was the matter. She saw a man with a pleasant enough personality, a pleasing voice and a nice taste in clothes who had been fortunate enough to inherit a large sum of money. If he had been seen in a small part in a third-rate company on a seaside pier people would have said, "Charming! Who is he?" Like so many others who believe that acting is the only profession which needs no apprenticeship and no training, nothing could get the idea out of his mind that he had only to plaster London with his name to take his place among the great actors of the day. Having surrounded himself with a body of sycophants who never by any chance offered him criticism, he set to work to choose only those plays in which the leading man's part occupied the center of the stage during the whole of their action. He was the actor-manager. His was the name that skimmed about London on 'buses and was to be seen up and down the streets on boards. What more was necessary? It never occurred to him, and, of course, no one ever put it into his mind, except one or two minor critics who wrote for papers which obtained no theatrical advertisements, that the British public is not entirely brainless. Like all men who live in the theater, think theater and talk theater, he was obsessed with the idea that the British public is not only brainless but idiotic. He could not understand

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how it was that men and women who managed to earn a living outside the theater—and, therefore, in one or other of the professions which was of little account—hesitated to pay cash to see him nightly and on two afternoons a week enjoying himself and feeding his vanity.

It was all, really, rather pitiful and very characteristic of the way in which theaters are run in London. Given, of course, that the rich young man one day met by accident a brutal person who told him the truth and that he had the courage and the sense to act upon it and either to go away to the country or to Australia and begin at the bottom of the ladder under good teaching, there was no earthly reason why he shouldn't develop into an extremely popular London actor-manager if his money held out. London is easily pleased. All the same, even a brilliant play can be entirely ruined by amateurishness, and this is what happened at the London Theater. The only thing that could be said in favor of the rich young person who thought that he could buy a commission was that he gave employment to many deserving, if curious, people—and Dick was among the number.

Sir Edward Morde, who was in some way related to the actor-manager who could neither act nor manage, put Dick into the theater over the heads of a large number of young women who had been working hard for years. She remained in it, not because she was a good actress—how could she be?—but because the actor-manager had fallen in love with her. For this reason she was promoted from understudying and



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took her place in the evening bill. Her beauty was good to look at, but her lack of training made it necessary for dramatists to cut down her part. The dramatist, like the policeman, does not enjoy a very happy life. He is altogether at the mercy of a rotten system. He will never be a happy man until actor-managers are all dead, buried and forgotten and theaters are in the hands of business men who leave the stage entirely under his direction.

Having spoken fifty lines in a drawing-room drama, thirty in a farce adapted from the French, thirteen in a romantic comedy of the Beau Brocade order, twenty in a sentimental play, very nearly a hundred in the dramatization of a much discussed novel by a lady, all of whose characters had tiger's eyes, Dick was now concerned in her characteristically slap-dash manner as to the frock she was to wear in the new production. She found no interest in her part and so took even less trouble over it than she had taken with the others. In desperation, having run the gamut, the actor-manager was now endeavoring to win his long-delayed popularity with a play by a new writer. This man was a vegetarian, a non-smoker. He had his hair cut by his wife and made his clothes himself. It goes without saying, therefore, that he was a Socialist. He did not belong to the variety which calls itself Christian Socialist. He regarded those old-fashioned non-thinkers who worshiped God as poisonous people. He said that they retarded the Great Onward Movement. The actor-manager himself, all his sycophants and all the members of his company, except one, who, while

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at Oxford, had studied the men and the methods of Ruskin Hall as a hobby, were unable to make head or tail of the play, so they spoke of it with bated breath. It was very, very clever. It must be.

Dick was to play the part of a young typist who was trying to entice her employer, a suburban auctioneer and estate agent, away from his religious wife. She was the heroine of this play. The actor-manager was the auctioneer. It was he who insisted upon the author's writing in a scene in which he had to kiss the typist upon the lips. Once, in private life, he had endeavored to do this on Dick's lips and for some moments he thought the ceiling had fallen upon him. The worst of it was that he had not achieved his object. As very little interest was shown by the press in the forthcoming production it was hoped that the Lord Chamberlain might raise an objection to it. This doubtful advertisement was denied to the actor-manager. The license was granted. The censor's inward comment was that the whole thing was too utterly silly to be pernicious and all its astounding new truths had been said before *ad nauseam*.

It came to the final rehearsals. The scenery had arrived. The rooms had been carefully modeled upon those of an actual auctioneer and estate agent who lived at Beckenham. The actor-manager, in his enthusiasm for realism, had bought a frock coat from a cash tailor and had had his hair cut by an Englishman in Beckenham, High Street. He looked forward, therefore, to splendid notices.

The second dress rehearsal was just over. It had

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been called for six o'clock. The curtain had risen on the first act at nine o'clock and had fallen on the last at three o'clock the following morning.

Thus it will be seen that the actor-manager was becoming quite an old theatrical hand, an artist. The author was not present at the second dress rehearsal. Perhaps that was because he had attended the first one. He sent a post card to the stage doorkeeper asking that his letters might be re-addressed to "The Lawrels," Rosslyn Road, Lower Tooting. He was a native of Tooting Graveney. An earnest critic who always liked to take forty-eight hours over his notices left the theater in a state bordering upon nervous prostration. He had laughed until he had cried and, as politeness demanded that he should suppress both, his condition was, indeed, deplorable.

Dick found Tony sitting in the stage doorkeeper's cubby hole explaining the mechanism of the old-fashioned hammer gun to the fireman. He was in evening clothes with a large-brimmed opera hat at an angle of forty-five. A satin-lined light black overcoat was neatly folded across his knees and he had just started his fourth cigar, a Corona.

"My dear old chap," he said, when he caught sight of Dick, "you must be absolutely doggo!"

Dick laughed. "Dear old Tony," she said, "I'm a bit fly these days. I've put in more sleep during this rehearsal than I've had for three nights. Strict orders to the call boy only to call me when my cue has been spoken. That's the wrinkle."

Tony rubbed his hands together. "Ah-ha!" he

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said. "Ah-ha! Trust an Okehampton! It's an old saying and true. Well, good-night, my friend. Don't forget to tell your wife to try inhaling exercises at the window every morning and night. Infallible for reducing weight. How about it, Dick? Taxi!"

"Oh, rather!" she said. "No. Let's walk. What do you think?"

"My dear," said Tony, "whatever you say goes."

They turned into the silent alley down which a sturdy policeman was coming, flicking his lantern on window latches and trying doors. Tony gave him an affable good-night, to which the policeman replied, "Good-morning." Before they arrived in Piccadilly Circus, Dick and Tony were walking arm in arm. Except for a prowling taxi or two, an occasional slow-moving market cart loaded high with cabbages, which seemed to leave behind it a thin trail of the smell of bricks and clay peculiar to Middlesex market gardens, they had Piccadilly to themselves. The road had been hosed and the gutters ran with water. The wood pavement of the more important side streets shone almost like looking-glass. It was a beautiful night. Every conceivable star was shining and a new moon lay slimly upon its back. The spring had been a late one and the leaves of some of the more cautious trees in the Park had only just ventured out.

"I didn't think you'd wait to-night, Tony."

"The faithful cavalier, old man."

Dick gave an affectionate squeeze to her father's arm. "I don't mind telling you," she said, "privately

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and in strict confidence, that walking home with you at night is the only thing that keeps me human."

Tony drew up short, stood in front of the astonished girl and peered into her face. His own was working oddly. "D'yer mean that?" he asked. "Oh, honestly, Dickie! D'yer mean it? Or are you saying it because yer think it'll be worth a thousand a minute to me?"

"I mean it," said Dick shortly. "But come on! A bobby's watching us. He'll think we're dotty."

Tony said nothing for six lamp posts. Two or three hot tears trickled into his mustache. He said to himself: "Thank God I had the pluck to remain the little gentleman. I'll keep Dick straight yet. That woman's against *me* this time. It's pull devil, pull baker."

"Well," said Dick, "I'll tell you what it is, Pa. You may confidently send a paragraph to the society papers as follows to-day fortnight: 'Mr. Antony Okehampton and Miss Dick Okehampton, the celebrated actress, have left London to drink buckets of sea water at Wimereux.'"

"Oh, hot stuff!" cried Tony. "Yes, but how? You're not going to chuck the piece, are you?"

"Oh, dear no. It's the piece that's going to chuck me."

"You've not had a row with——"

"Dear old Tony, I have diplomacy. Our new play is one of those masterpieces which ends in a fortnight."

"Oh, let's hope for the best."

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"I am. If we're not very careful, all of us, it won't get further than the second act to-morrow. The B. P.'s getting fed up. I'm betting that they'll throw the walls at us and portions of the ceiling."

"You're not in luck, Dick, that's certain. I think you'll have to chuck the theater and go into a musical play."

"I'm seriously considering it, dear papa. I can't sing and I can't dance, so I shall be perfectly all right. In any case I don't care two cusses. I'm all for the sea and for peace. I dunno what it is, but I can't bear the flat. It's a cross between a cemetery and a circus."

Tony's voice took on an eager note. "Do what I did, Dick. Turn it up, my dear. Escape! Come into rooms with me."

Dick threw out her hand. "I can't. There's mother. Harry's never there. She'd be alone. She might set herself on fire or something. Hullo! Here we are."

"Yes, worse luck."

Dick eyed the polished door of Park Court with a look of fear. "Jolly good mind to see you home," she said.

"Not in this world!" said Tony. "Why, dash it, it's nearly daylight! And you've got a first night to-morrow—I mean to-night."

"Yes. Well, so-long, Tony."

"Good-night, my darling."

The father waited until the night porter opened the door, until the girl had waved her hand and until the door was shut behind her. Then, without glancing up

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at the windows of the place, he hurried away. His way was Brewer Street.

Now Brewer Street connects Regent Street with the French market. It begins rather well. The first of its houses still have about them an air of dignity. It is a little faded, a little pathetic. It has one or two houses which have fought against the addition of shop fronts—houses in which even doctors might live. But then comes a turning, at one corner of which there is a public house. Consistently enough this faced a pawnbroker's. After which, there is little to be said for Brewer Street, with its little paper shops filled with picture post cards from Belgium and racing tips from Amsterdam, its characteries under and above which many families live like rabbits in their warrens. Into the reek and stench, the orange peel and banana skins, the noise of mechanical piano-players, the shouts of fruit vendors, fat little Jew girls with big bows on their shoes constantly make their way, carrying newly stitched clothes beneath black cloths over their arms. They rub shoulders with thrifty French and German housewives, costermongers, lusty-lunged butchers, undersized Swiss waiters and hosts of little children with dirty faces, dogs who peer among the offal, and electricians.

It was in one of the houses which ought to have belonged to a doctor, and may have done in the old glad past, that Mr. Antony Okehampton now lived, alone. He had three rooms on the second floor, three old-fashioned rooms with wainscoted walls and uneven floors. They were furnished by the little old

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woman who took lodgers, and their atmosphere was mid-Victorian. There was something to Dick which suggested Miss Emily Sarah about them because there were antimacassars and an ornament made of hair under a glass case. The front room was a sitting-room, one of the back rooms a bedroom and the other a dressing-room. In these Tony endeavored to live like a gentleman on the two pounds a week reserved by him from Thoresby's allowance. Allowance was Tony's own word. The good little woman below could not, however, undertake cooking, and Tony found it at first so expensive to get his meals out that he began to lose weight, and his charming clothes hung a little less well upon him. He said nothing to Dick, but after the first month of his escape a kind friend who desired to remain anonymous sent him postal orders weekly in a registered envelope to the tune of five sovereigns.

The handwriting was Dick's.

Tony appreciated the anonymity. After all, he was a little gentleman. It was necessary for him to eat at his club and to go to Savile Row for his clothes. So he said nothing aloud, but every Saturday morning inwardly he made the same remark without any variation: "She's a sportsman, by God, she is!"



## CHAPTER II

**D**RUSILLA had not been idle. Unable to turn her mackerel eye upon Tony and pull him down once more from his reërected foundations, she made a close study of Dick. She was intensely delighted to discover, to her infinite surprise, that Dick, although careless, was virtuous. Here, then, was something for her to do. Here was a very pleasant way of occupying her undrugged moments. Dick set up for being "straight," did she? Dick played with fire and saw to it that she wasn't burned, did she? *Bon Dieu, il y a toujours des choses à faire.*

But, first of all, Drusilla had a keen desire to find out who paid for the flat, and why. She put Dick under a dozen unsuspected cross-examinations. She used all her curious charm of manner to this end without success, and this brought her to another discovery almost as surprising as the first. Dick did not know. And then a third surprise followed. Dick was not a liar. Yes, quite obviously, she need not weep bitter tears because Tony could no longer be practiced upon. Dick was far more interesting.

But Drusilla was a woman of resource. She watched Harry when that independent young lady, who traveled considerably, found it convenient to make use of Park Court. She put Harry under the pump.

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Harry's mouth had in it the tongue of Saphira. Harry, she found, took after herself and deliberately misled her. In fact, so strong was the resemblance between mother and daughter that Harry invented a round half dozen intricate and ingenious lies by way of keeping herself in practice. She liked Harry. She was a chip of the old block. At the same time her curiosity was insatiable. She discovered Harry's weakness for Grand Marnier. So she laid in a stock of this heating liquid, and one night when she and Harry were alone in the flat she gave her more than enough to open the door of this Blue Room.

The next morning she wrote a cordial letter to Thoresby, inviting him to tea. She had made up her mind that Dick, the virtuous Dick, should become Lady Thoresby at the proper time. The proper time would not be until Drusilla had done for Dick what she had done for Dick's father, but more thoroughly.

It so happened that Thoresby received the letter, in which unfortunately a delicious quotation from Georges Sand was wasted upon him, on the day upon which it was posted. He had just returned from Paris. He did himself very well these days, and went about in a quiet but unostentatious blaze of middle-age dignity. He traveled a courier as well as a man servant and took a Gilbertian delight in the size and frequency of his coronet. He might have been a prime minister or an ambassador or a person who had made so much money out of soap or pills or whisky that he had been positively obliged to buy a peerage, except of course that Billy Russon had inherited that horsy

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look which **only** comes to those whose ancestors spent all their days in the lists.

He had seen nothing of Tony Okehampton since Christmas week. Tony had then called upon him, and in his best flamboyant manner had asked him to accept just a little thing as a Christmas present. It was a gold matchbox upon which was cut the following legend: "Indemnity for the past and security for the future." Since then he had seen nothing of Tony or his family. He had avoided seeing Dick. He was too much in love with her to enjoy seeing her with the men of her set, René de Maingache, Morde, the actor-manager and the rest. He was, therefore, quite unaware of the changes at Park Court. His bankers paid his allowance to Tony quarterly. Harry had long ago found him unnecessary.

He walked to Knightsbridge, and was a little surprised to see Dick's name carried on the shoulders of sandwich men.

Drusilla was alone. She came to him in the drawing-room. She slid into the room and stood in front of him with her large head on one side smiling, as she thought, roguishly. Her dry red hair was streaked with gray. There were deep lines under her eyes and her face was so patterned with lines that they might have been deliberately placed there as they are upon women of native tribes. She wore a sort of nun-like robe and one shoe with a high heel which belonged to Harry and a bath slipper. Her stockings hung in sags about her ankles. She had evidently just got out of bed.

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Thoresby was not quite happy. He wished that he had sent an excuse. "Well," he said, "I needn't ask how you are. I mean——"

"Unfortunate," said Druscilla, "distinctly unfortunate. But do sit down. There is no charge for the pews here. Besides, do not let us forget. Are they not your chairs?"

Thoresby was startled and uncharacteristically at a loss. "How's Tony?" he asked.

"Still whitewashing. He lives alone, but shows himself at certain hours of the day to an admiring crowd. He is in his dotage, I think, and I believe has found religion. It amuses him and doesn't do anybody any harm."

"And the girls?" asked Thoresby, in complete sympathy with his old friend.

"Oh, the darlings! My sweet babies! Harry's making a complete study of man and dear Dick is developing into a leading lady."

"I saw her name in the streets," said Thoresby.

"Where inevitably you may soon find Harry. And so, that puts you completely up to date, does it not? But before we have tea, dear Lord Thoresby, let me say one thing. There are, as we know, I from hearsay, you from actual knowledge, a multitude of kind Scotchmen who lend money at sixty per cent. It has been left to you to pay back your debt at the same rate of interest. It is very beautiful. It heartens me."

"Oh, that's all right," said Thoresby. "Er—what a jolly view from this window!"

A servant brought in tea, and so Druscilla merely

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laughed. The tray contained a Wedgewood teapot, milk jug and sugar basin, but only one cup. A small decanter of brandy was there, however, and a very graceful glass.

Thoresby had tea. He was not entertained. He listened for half an hour to a series of well-turned sentences in every one of which there was a sting. He listened to comments on current events which made each one tumble like a pricked bladder. He felt himself gradually becoming coated with fungi. He pined for fresh air and the noise of traffic and the sight of a paper boy dodging death upon a bicycle, and it was only when he got up to go that Drusilla showed him why he had been asked to the flat.

"Now that you have become one of the pillars of our nation," she said, "surely you must begin to think about posterity. In other words, why don't you take a wife? Let us be frank, dear friend. A little bird has whispered to me that my sweet Dick——"

"Oh, no," said Thoresby; "please!"

"But"—she threw up her hands—"other men have ignored the deceased wife's sister's bill. Dick would look well in a coronet if only you could persuade her to wash her face. Now, I am a woman who believes in gratitude. You are a man who practices it. Let us make a bargain. I will help you to make Dick your wife. She is a dutiful child. She is unattached. What do you say?"

Thoresby was silent for a moment. His thoughts went back to the night on the hill and his heart beat quickly as he saw the girl with the golden hair sitting

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at the head of his table. "You're very kind," he said, "or at least you're very—well—I give it up. Knowing me and knowing—things, you seem to take a rather quaint—or at any rate a rather——"

He shook his head and held out his hand. "Good-bye," he added. "If you'll forgive me I must get along now."

Drusilla held his hand tightly. "Think it over," she said. "Think it over, dear friend, for Dick's sake."

As Thoresby walked quickly away he shook himself like a dog which had just emerged from a pond covered with slime. But the idea was planted in his brain. Dick as his wife. It was impossible. Dick as his wife. After all, why not?

### CHAPTER III

**D**ICK went to supper with René de Maingauche after the production of the new play. These two were great friends now. The Frenchman was at the flat morning, noon and night. Drusilla cut herself out to be very brilliant to him and edged herself into his good graces not only by leaving Dick alone with him as often as possible but by throwing her into his company on Sundays. Her feeling toward René was that almost of a sister. She recognized in him many of her own characteristics. He was only just a little bit saner than she was. She, therefore, used him as a means toward bringing Dick off her pedestal. René was obviously the man to help. It would be all the easier because Dick liked him. He was good-looking. Romance hung about him. Money never seemed to fail him, and he never disguised the fact that he was passionately in love. She felt that she could sit down to meals with Dick much more comfortably after she had been brought down to her own level, or nearly. She knew that Dick, like her father, was weak, and also, like her father, obstinate. She was clinging grimly to the fact that she was different from Harry and from other girls in her set. Once this little bit of an anchor was cast off, away would

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go Dick in the middle of the stream. It was inevitable. She was an Okehampton.

Mrs. Tony's deductions were entirely accurate, and as day after day went by and the mother's subtle poison was injected into Dick drop by drop the time when Dick would fulfill her mother's prophecy came nearer and nearer.

The day after the production and the supper, Drusilla tapped at Dick's bedroom door. It was twelve o'clock. Sun poured into the bedroom. Dick was chuckling over the notices in the daily papers. To her amazement they were not only favorable but enthusiastic. They welcomed the play as a masterpiece. They gave the author a high place among the new school and one or two of them even went so far as to say with intense sincerity that the play owed nothing to Bernard Shaw. Having waded through them all Dick mentally relegated her holiday with her father into the limbo of impossible things. The London Theater had a success at last. She need not have disturbed herself. The man in the box office had nothing to do and the libraries refused to interest themselves.

Drusilla sat on the bed. She smiled through her grief. She listened to Dick's excited talk with occasional sighs. One paper said that Miss Dick Okehampton's very gaucherie was the perfection of art, and demonstrated the possession of genius in this young actress. While endeavoring to prevent Dick from seeing that there was something the matter she made the fact clearer than if she had said so.



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Dick said within ten minutes of her mother's appearance: "Great Cæsar's ghost, mother! What in the world's up?"

Drusilla opened her eyes very wide. "Darling!" she said, "what *do* you mean?"

"Oh, don't cod! Let's have it, whatever it is."

"Have what? I quite fail to understand you."

"No, you don't," said Dick. "Something's the matter and you want me to know. Very well, tell me."

"But nothing's the matter, I give you my——"

Dick made a great uneven ball of all the papers and tossed it on to the floor. "Now, then, mother," she said, "please."

This was exactly what Drusilla had worked for. She said: "Darling, I wanted to hide this from you. There is something looming ahead of us which will certainly send me back to Bloomsbury and your father either in the workhouse or to gaol."

"Not while I'm alive," said Dick.

Drusilla picked up one of Dick's hands and kissed the fingers. "My pet," she said, "don't think that I have forgotten how brave you are. But don't forget that your position in the London Theater is built on sand. You are only there, and you know it deep down in your heart, for one reason."

"Let's pass that," said Dick, who knew it well enough. "There are other theaters, you know."

"And a multitude of other pretty girls. I don't say that this cloud is going to break upon us immediately, but it is coming up against the wind, and you know what that means."

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"No, I don't," said Dick. "Do speak in words of one syllable."

Drusilla got up and walked about. Her uneasy figure wobbled as she moved. She looked more than ever like a Rossetti woman who had spent several nights on a haystack. Her untidiness was epoch-making. "I must put you," she said, "on your word of honor. What can I do but drag you into these family troubles? My husband deserts me. One of my daughters leads her own life. It is always the good who suffer."

"Go on, mother," said Dick.

Drusilla stopped. "Thoresby was here yesterday afternoon," she said.

"Yes, but what's that got to do with it?"

"Everything. I suppose you know—you must know. It's obvious—that the money with which we run this flat does not fall upon us like the gentle rain from heaven."

"Billy owed Tony money," said Dick, "and he paid up."

Drusilla smiled sadly. "You sweet, unpractical thing!" she said. "All Thoresby owed was five hundred pounds. As a matter of fact, with generosity which is quite unusual, he gave Tony twice that amount."

"Well, what's the matter with a thousand?" asked Dick.

"The matter with a thousand is that it cannot be drawn upon for furniture, pictures and plate, to say nothing of linen, pay the rent of this flat, which is

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three hundred a year, keep us here in luxury and remain intact in the bank. The days of miracles are over. Not only has the thousand pounds long since come to an end, but I am steeped in debt."

Dick sat up very straight. "But Billy's got stacks of money," she said, "stacks of it."

"Quite," said Drusilla. "But can you give me any good reason why he should play the fairy godfather to me, to you, to Harry or to the man who has already sponged on him to such a tune? *Can* you? I ask you?"

Dick swallowed. Her face was very white. "No," she said, "but why did Thoresby come yesterday?"

Like all complete liars Drusilla told something of the truth. "He came because I sent for him. He came in answer to a letter in which I humbled myself. He came, had tea with me and listened to my frantic appeals for help."

"Frantic appeals for help!" echoed Dick. "Is it as bad as all that, then?"

"It is so bad, my darling, so dreadfully bad that if something isn't done and done quickly the awful story of Quennor will be repeated."

Dick shivered.

Drusilla felt that she was progressing favorably. "I didn't spare myself yesterday afternoon," she said; "believe me, metaphorically, I threw myself on my knees at the feet of this hitherto generous man. I pointed out to him that if he didn't open his purse you must inevitably lose my protection, Harry would no longer have a nest to which to return—God knows

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she finds there a mother bird whose very soul aches to bring her back to the straight path—and Tony, poor dear old Tony, who has pulled himself out of the mire, who takes such a pride and pleasure in being a gentleman again, who even refused to live with me because, alas! I am an invalid in mind as well as body, yes, even poor dear old Tony must sink back into degradation.”

Dick shut her eyes. Such a picture was too terrible to look at. “Won’t Billy do anything?” she asked.

“There is a limit to generosity, my dear, and Thoresby needs all his money. He gave me a little to go on with, as much as he could afford—it’s a drop in the ocean—and said many kind and helpful things.”

“Is that all?”

Drusilla had not enjoyed herself so exquisitely for a considerable time. She was playing on this child’s feelings with as much art as a great pianist upon his instrument. “He made,” she said, “two suggestions, both of which I fear are impossible, the latter indeed entirely out of the question. He said that you were earning money, good money—enough money perhaps to take a little modest flat in some slum in which you and I and your father might live in some semblance of, well, hardly comfort, and with, I fear, no peace.”

“He doesn’t know much about my salary,” said Dick. And she added to herself, “or what I love to do with it.” “What was the other suggestion?”

Drusilla shrugged her shoulders. “I don’t think,” she said, “that it is worth while to mention it to you at all.”

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"I may as well have it."

"Very well. But before I give it you, bear this well in mind: I will say this for Thoresby. He's what you would call a sportsman and what *I* should call, in my possibly pedantic way, a good fellow. What he said he said—I think I may almost call it humbly, gently, tentatively. He did not make a bargain. I should have ordered him from the house. What he did say was that of course there was one way out of all this for us. If you were to become his wife your allowance would be a large one, and he should be glad to think that you devoted some part of it to those you loved and who love you. Those were his very words, though of course I cannot give them to you with anything like a suggestion of his delightful manner."

"What did you say?" asked Dick.

"My dear, what could I say? I think I wept a little. In my mind I saw many dreadful pictures. You, no longer able to treat your theatrical admirers with a lofty contempt, but going through your day a sycophant among sycophants, thinking only of the utterly inadequate salary without which there could be no roof, no food, no clothing, nothing, in a word, between Tony and cadging, between me and death, because, frankly it would be my only friend."

"So," said Dick, "you said nothing."

"Nothing!" said her mother.

Thoresby was as old as Dick's father. He looked older because his hair had gone very white. When Dick had ever considered the subject of marriage it

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seemed to her to be something curiously sacred, the beginning of a new life. She had always thought that the man who married her would be one for whom she would give up everything, who would make her utterly insignificant in the scheme of things. It was the one thing about which she wove a romantic web.

She slipped out of bed, went across to an untidy table, found a sheet of note paper and wrote a short note.

If you haven't got anything particular on, to-day, I'll come along to lunch. Yours ever,

DICK.

She put it in an envelope and addressed it to Thoresby. "Mother," she said, "do you mind ringing up a boy messenger and having this taken?"

"Very well," said Drusilla. "Of course, you tell me nothing. Of course, I am not consulted." But when she left the room the expression on her face could not be found on that of any gargoyle on any building in any country.

She found a man standing with his back to the morning-room door.

"And who do these fine shoulders belong to?" she asked.

"Frightfully sorry. I thought I might find Dick at home."

It was Jack.

## CHAPTER IV

**D**RUSILLA had heard vaguely about Jack, but her excitement was so intense at her triumph that her uncanny love for experimentalizing was forgotten for the moment. She left Jack alone. Having telephoned for a boy messenger, she went into her chaotic bedroom, sat on her bed and hugged herself gleefully. How easy, how perfectly simple it was to deal with obstinate people, she thought. Given time and patience, and not much of either, she would do for Dick what she had done for Dick's father. She would marry Thoresby. That was certain. But first she must be Maingauched. That was the next thing to arrange. Yes, oh yes, life had its joys, and even a woman who went nowhere and did nothing could find amusements if she chose.

As for Jack, who stood in great spirits looking into the Park, he simply said to himself: "Quaint-looking old bird! Immensely clever though, I expect. Somehow you can always tell a clever woman by her hair!" And then he forgot the lady. He had come to call for Dick—Dick whom he hadn't seen for nine months, Dick whom he was to see now by a pleasant accident. He had managed to obtain a fortnight's unex-

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pected leave. He sent his name up, and he knew that Dick's room was above the one in which he stood. He heard a series of wumps on the floor, and gurgled with laughter as he guessed what they were. It was Dick getting up.

Dick came downstairs in the old way, and as she came she gave a view hallo! which brought Jack to the door.

Dick sprang at him and punched him in the chest. "Hullo, old heart of oak! Hullo, Union Jack! England expects that every man this day will do his duty."

Jack clapped his heels together and saluted and uttered roars of apparently meaningless laughter. He had so much to say and was not able to say any of it! He was so frightfully glad to see her and his dictionary did not contain the sort of words he required! So he made a tremendous noise. And Dick, always excited by noise and always sent into the highest spirits by the sight of Jack, danced a hornpipe, and cried out: "Easterstoperturnerstern!" and any number of equally idiotic and perfectly natural things. The prim bachelor who lived below came to the conclusion that a troupe of music hall artists were rehearsing a new sketch. He sat down and wrote a letter of bitter complaint to his landlord. He was not a very human person. His complaint might easily have been called heart nostalgia.

Dick was dressed, but her hair, her wonderful hair, was all loose. She bundled it up sitting on the arm of a chair. There had been no time to cover her face with paint. She was the Dick of Sydenham, the



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Dick of the hills and the trees and the bumblebees, the Dick whom Jack adored in a speechless, eternal way.

"My dear old Jacko," she said. "This is the greatest thing on record. Look at his face, London! Look at the man's face, ye cockneys! Why, you're brown to the bone, old boy. You make me feel like a pallid piece of toast. When did you get to town?"

"Last night," said Jack. "I very nearly came to your first night. A footlight favorite now, eh? My word, what larks! But mother's one of the best and all that and so I played cribbage with her and gave her a series of slightly bowdlerized word pictures of life afloat. We had a topping evening. Then I sat up nearly all night trying to write a letter to you. It seemed to me rather hot stuff before I turned in, but when I read it in bed this morning it put me off my appetite, so I did away with it and came along instead. You're a winner, I see by the papers."

"Enormous success!" said Dick. "Colossal!" She was well up in theatrical terms, and, like most people connected with the theater, firmly believed that the verdict of the critics was the verdict of playgoers. "No holiday for me this year," she said. "We shall run through the season."

Jack made a grimace. "I suppose you couldn't put on an understudy, could you? With two matinées a week and a performance every night it doesn't look like my seeing much of you."

"'Miss Dick Okehampton's very gaucherie proves her to be the possessor of genius.'" She quoted the gushing line with gusto. "If I left the bill master

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actor-manager would have a fit. We shall have to arrange to lunch and dine together every day, that's all. And I tell you what you can do for me, Jacko. You can run me down to Quennor one Sunday. How's that?"

"Great!" said Jack. "Just what I was going to suggest. By the way, I saw your sister at the hotel at Portsmouth. She introduced me to her husband."

Dick gave a jump. There didn't seem to be anything to say. She merely nodded.

"Nice-looking chap, I thought. Awfully young to be married. She's not a bit like you, is she? How are your people?"

"They're all right," said Dick.

"Your father's out, eh?"

"Tony doesn't—well, in a word, I'm sure it's very nice of you to be so conventional. What lovely weather for the time of year! Have you seen the piece at His Majesty's? And are you going to the Horse Show?" She laughed and said all these things in a sort of mock society way. She wished that it wasn't so awkward to answer questions about her father and mother and Harry.

Jack was really not interested. There were untold millions of fathers and mothers in the world. There was only one Dick. She sat within three feet of him, and he would have given his career and all the remaining years of his life to hold her in his arms and kiss her and hear her say: "I love you."

And then the servant brought up a note for Dick. "For me?" she asked. "Who the dickens?"

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She opened it. Thoresby wrote:

Do come. I shall be delighted.

And he signed it Billy.

Jack looked puzzled. It seemed to him that a rush of cold air had suddenly swept over Dick.

"No answer," she said, and sat looking at the thing in her hand for some moments.

"Anything wrong?" asked Jack.

"Oh, Lord, no! Something absolutely right—look here. Did you come in the car?"

"Rather. Catch me walking. Frightful fog."

"Well, how about running me down to the corner of Half Moon Street. I've got to lunch there. After which you can fetch me, if you like."

"Like!" said Jack.

Dick got up. She was not the same girl who had danced the hornpipe. She went up to Jack and put her hand on his shoulder and looked at him. "You're a sight for sore eyes, Jacko," she said, "a mighty good sight. I wish you were my brother. Wait a second while I shove on a hat, will you?"

"A brother!" said Jack to himself. "Well, that's pretty good. Mustn't grumble."

He wished that the road to Half Moon Street was a thousand miles long. As it was, he managed to make it longer than it happened to be by a series of brilliant maneuvers. At almost every turning he managed somehow to be stopped by the traffic, and he put himself into a most beautiful scrum of vehicles at the corner of Hamilton Place. A man in the win-

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dow of the Bachelors' Club caught his eye and waved his hand and lowered his right eyelid. Jack had always known him for a poisonous beast. He would make a point of looking him up and telling him so in the ripe language of the sea.

Dick was very quiet. She looked very tired and, it seemed to Jack, a good deal older since he had seen her last. He put her down in front of the curious-looking building and went up the steps with her. "What time shall I come again?" he said.

"What time is it now?"

"One-thirty."

"Make it two-thirty," she said. She held out her hand. "Good-bye, Jack."

"Good-bye!—Why?"

"I dunno," she said, "but one of these days you will."

She went in.

## CHAPTER V

**T**HORESBY didn't know what to make of it. Of course, the mother was behind it. He was certainly not good fun enough for Dick to invite herself to lunch. He could not persuade himself that Dick was coming in order to help on her mother's plan. Why should she? He was old Bill, old Thoresby. He was looked upon by Dick as a sort of septuagenarian. He had heard her talk about old man Morde, old Gobbo Morde, old Father Christmas, and, after all, Morde was only a year or two older than he was.

Thoresby had made something of a study of Drusilla in the Quennor days. He had been left standing still by her cunning. He knew that she had the sort of tongue that could undermine a religion. Obviously, therefore, she must have said something to Dick. The point was what? Or was this just a coincidence? Was Dick coming because she wanted to? That was her reason for doing things. He was perfectly well aware of the fact that she knew nothing of the arrangement between himself and her father.

He gave it up. The fact remained that Dick was coming and that was good. With a touch of uncharacteristic excitement, Thoresby took a personal interest in the luncheon. He went around into Picca-

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dilly and bought a great bundle of flowers, hothouse roses, mostly. He arranged them himself. He made the dining table a very blaze of color, and then, just before she came, he put a bunch in a large blue bowl on a table in the hall to give her welcome. In a rather ridiculous way he changed his tie several times and endeavored to make his thin gray hair a little less gray by putting on brilliantine. He laughed at himself, but the laugh was a little sour. "Gee!" he said. "I'm not so horrid old. Hang it! I'm only fifty. With care and courage I'm good for twenty-three years, twenty-three highly respectable, jocular years, useful, exemplary years. Why not?"

The bell rang several times and each time he jumped up, and when Dick arrived, punctually, for a wonder, he felt absurdly boyish and nervous.

Dick was charmingly dressed and it was the first time since she had come to those rooms that he had seen her face. "Oh, no!" he said to himself. "Oh, no! Impossible, my friend, quite!"

Dick was in one of her quiet moods. She made no attempt to be good company, so she was very natural. She gave no imitations, nor did she force hilarity.

"Awfully nice place you've got here, Bill," she said. "I hope I haven't botched up any of your engagements."

"My dear kid, this is an honor."

"Don't pull my leg," said Dick. "I vote we treat each other like very old friends, say exactly what we mean without any bluff or blither."

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"Right you are," said Thoresby. "I should like to." It was a very serious Dick to-day, an unexpectedly different Dick. "I got back the night before last. Went over to have a look at the trees in the Bois."

"I know," said Dick. "I wanted to be the first of your pals to look you up."

"Is that true?" asked Thoresby eagerly. "I'm sorry, but you said that we were to treat each other like old friends, didn't you?"

"Then it isn't true," said Dick. "It's a lie."

The door opened and the man appeared. "Lunch-con is served, my lord," he said.

So Dick added: "But we'll keep all this till after lunch."

As Thoresby followed her into the dining-room he asked himself: "All what?" and continued to ask himself the same question over and over again throughout the meal.

Dick paid him compliments. "This beats the Ritz, old boy," she said. "Quite tweeky! And, by Jove, don't those roses sing."

Thoresby laughed. "Sing?" he asked.

"Why not?" said Dick. "All flowers sing. Roses are operatic. There used to be a tree of Tetraxinis at Quennor that always woke me up in the morning. I wish I knew Paris."

"I'd like to introduce her to you."

"You may have the chance, soon," said Dick.

Thoresby bent forward. "What do you mean?"

"Let me see," said Dick. "Where are we? Quite early in the courses. Give me until the coffee comes."

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After that Thoresby ate little. He listened to Dick. He put one or two leading questions and drew her out on the subject of theatricals. She said several dry sarcastic things about them and in the way she turned her phrases she reminded him curiously of Drusilla. She was a wonderful mixture of her parents, a sort of Bowdlerised edition of both.

"If it's all the same to you," said Dick, "I think we'll have coffee in the drawing-room."

"Just as you like. Why?"

"I dunno. I think the drawing-room will give me a touch of dignity which I shall need."

Thoresby made it so. He carried a box of cigarettes in with him. It awoke unpleasant memories. It was the one which Tony wanted to throw at his head. It seemed a long time ago. He opened it and held it out to Dick.

She shook her head. "I'm not smoking, thanks," she said. "I'm in training for a lady."

Thoresby was unable to make it out. This was not the first time during this odd hour that Dick had said things enigmatically that made him jump. "Where would you like to sit?" he asked.

She took a chair with an uncompromising back. "Bolt upright, here," she said. The sun, dodging a stack of chimneys which looked foolishly like the pipes of an organ, fell upon her hair and shoulders. She moved into its caress. The sun was a very faithful friend, rather like Jack.

"You don't mind my smoking," said Thoresby.

"Oh, please," said Dick and laughed. "There's no



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doubt about it, but we're in very high society, you and I."

Thoresby remained standing with his back to the empty grate. He wondered what on earth he was smoking.

And then Dick, looking up at him, came to the point. "Not because you've been very kind to us," she said, "or for any other reason of that sort, I'm going to ask you to do me a turn. What do you think about it?"

"There's nothing that I wouldn't do for you, Dick."

"I had a sort of notion you felt like that. I remember your face that Sunday when the Black Prince ran me down to Brighton."

"I could have murdered the brute," said Thoresby. He said: "I love you, I love you," passionately to himself. He was afraid to say it aloud.

"Well," said Dick. "It's like this. I'm sick of the stage. I'm sick of restaurants and suppers. I'm sick of Black Princes and motor cars and I'm dead sick of putting paint on my face. Would you like me to be Lady Thoresby? If so, say so. If it doesn't meet your views, say so."

"Dick!" The man stood very still. He was breathless.

"Well?" she said. She liked him for his economy of words and actions.

He made a rather pitiful gesture. "But I'm old, my dear," he said.

"Not so very," said Dick. "Not as old as I am."

"Then, too, I've been on the long trail."

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"So have I," said Dick. "Is it yes?"

"No," said Thoresby. "I'm—by Jove, I'm funky! You've been put up to this. Someone's coercing you. You never would have asked me such a question on your own. Dick, be honest with me. I'll tell you this very straight. I love you. There's enough man in me left for that. I'd play the game, by you, too. You should have everything you wanted and as little of me as you could put up with. But I'm not going to have you forced upon me."

"Is it yes?" asked Dick. "Quaint how we Okehamptons do everything the wrong way 'round."

Thoresby went over to Dick and turned her face into the sun and looked straightly at her. "Be honest with me, Dick," he said again. "You don't quite know what this means to me. When a man turns over a new leaf he's rather proud of the fact. Mine was turned over for me, but I'm rather proud of it all the same. I'm very keen to keep it without dog's ears. Tell me this. Is your mother behind all this?"

"Is it yes?" asked Dick.

"I see that she is," said Thoresby. He was deeply disappointed.

"Is it yes?" asked Dick. "I'm not going to lie to you, but I'm not going to tell you the truth. That is, I'm not going to tell it all. All I'll say is pretty much what I've said before. I'm sick, just sick. I want to be Lady Thoresby."

"You *want* to be?" That was better than nothing.

"Yes, I want to be. Is it yes?"

"Yes."

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"Thank you," said Dick. She held out her hand and shook the trembling one that he gave her like a boy. Then she laughed and took a cigarette and lit it. "The last," she said, "absolutely! The Earl and Countess of Thoresby are shortly leaving town for Paris to look at the trees in the Bois. Lady Thoresby is, of course, the Miss Dick Okehampton whose very gaucherie proved her to be the possessor of genius." Then she threw her cigarette away as though she were throwing away the whole of her past. "Let's be married quietly, Bill, and slip out of it all. Or do you want a splash?"

"I want what you want," said Thoresby. His voice broke a little. "Dick, my dear, I hope you'll never regret this. I'm—by Jove, I'm very funky."

"That's all right," said Dick. "I don't know much about golf or tennis, but I think you'll find that I know the rules of cricket. How goes the time?"

"Half-past two," said Thoresby.

"Is it? Then I must go. The only boy of all the boys I know who will be in the set of Lord and Lady Thoresby is waiting for me below. Bye-bye." She nodded and went to the door, hesitated and came back.

And when Thoresby kissed the upturned cheek he did so as Sir Galahad might have done.

Gee! How the broncho-busters would have laughed!

## CHAPTER VI

**I**T seemed as though fate were in league with Drusilla. The woman had played upon all that was best in Dick's loyal, obstinate, wild, headstrong, unformed nature. For the sake of her father and mother she had sacrificed herself. As though that were not enough, Providence put her in the way of receiving two deep wounds that day and in this way helped Drusilla to her next abominable move.

The faithful Jack grinned gleefully when Dick took her seat at his side. He had been home to lunch, a rather hurried lunch. His mother and Dick were the only two women in the world. He had come back with a nice little scheme in his head. His mother knew most things. She knew also about Dick. He wanted them to meet. He was full of heart. At lunch he had repeated Dick's words in which brother had come. The dear old lady had smiled. "All proper women say that to the man they eventually marry," she said, "because all proper women love their brothers very nearly as much as they love their husbands." And so Jack felt thirty years younger, although he was only twenty-five. What a thing it was to have a mother!

He turned his car up Piccadilly. His destination was Eaton Square.

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"Which way?" said Dick.

"My way," said Jack.

"Right-o. Go ahead. It's all the same to me."

"Had a pleasant lunch?"

"First class. Nothing but surprises. Nearly everything was out of season."

"Amusing people?"

"Person," said Dick. "Not a bit amusing."

"Oh, Lord!" said Jack.

"No. I was glad about it. He was the biggest surprise of them all."

"Oh, a man, eh?"

"Yes," said Dick, "a man." She underlined the word with a very thick stroke.

Oddly enough, Jack had not ever felt jealous in regard to Dick. He did not feel jealous now. Something told him, although he had never made a study of girls and their feelings and their odd fumble after the truth, that Dick was the same with every other man as she was with him. He felt, and he was very glad to feel, that she was utterly heart-whole. All he did know was that he was in it ever so slightly. He had all her letters, those curious, slangy letters, alive with quick, vivid touches and full of a glorious comradeship. If his mother was right, and his mother was always right, then all he had to do was to wait. His mother had called Dick a child and him a boy.

"Make your career safe," she said, "before you speak and then do not take no. I fancy that your Dick will make a very proper woman. Let me see her."

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And so the sun for Jack was twice as big as usual. There were just two things that he meant to do. One was to marry Dick and the other was to be an admiral, and both looked very certain that bright afternoon.

They turned off at Hyde Park Corner and ran through the labyrinth of houses, which were nearly all the same, ugly smug houses to the eye, but extremely comfortable. Most of them were blushing beneath the paint of spring. They were white with that optimism which recurs in spite of endless rebuffs. Here and there was to be seen a more cautious color—the chocolate of Pimlico.

A wedding was to take place at St. Peter's, Eaton Square. The awnings were out and the red carpet, over which so many feet had passed, in and out again, and then God knows where. The inevitable crowd of women waited patiently—a curious crowd, made up for the most part of married women. Perhaps their curiosity was tinged with a little sarcasm, or does romance never die? There were butcher boys there, too. Dick looked at all these people and at the awning and at the church as those people look at hearses who have followed some person whom they love to the grave. Dick had buried romance.

The car turned to the right and then the left and stopped in front of a house that had received no new paint that spring, but which, for all that, looked very cheerful with its flower boxes of geraniums, white and red.

“Hullo,” said Dick, “what’s this?”

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"This," said Jack, "is me."

Dick smiled and got out, went up the steps to the front door, which opened at once, as though she had been expected.

Jack followed her at a bound and nodded to an elderly man with a profusion of white hair and a face which might have belonged to a bishop. The hall was full of trophies, curious old guns and sabers, long pistols with big handles and crossed lances with pennons hanging limp. There was an oil painting on the wall of a man in military uniform, with a large mustache and side whiskers and a very determined chin. The eyes were Jack's.

"My father."

"I know."

The boy led the way upstairs. The wall was covered with groups of officers and men in camp, under barrack walls—mementoes, inspirations. On the first landing Jack stopped, tapped at the door and waited until a soft voice said: "Come in."

The room was very large and light and airy. It was filled with pieces of big furniture. There was a big desk and a large pipe-rack at the side of the fireplace crammed with old favorites used no longer. There were bookcases and more swords on the walls, more groups, and at least a dozen paintings of the same woman, some young, some no longer young. It was a man's room.

And away in the corner sitting in a man's chair was a little old lady behind gold-rimmed spectacles, with her feet on a hassock, with two big black cats mount-

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ing guard. One of them rose as Jack came in and elevated a tail, mewling silently.

"Mother," said Jack, "this is Dick."

The little old lady held out her hand, held Dick's warmly for a moment; then Dick was pulled forward and kissed on each cheek.

"You're very welcome, my dear."

"Thank you," said Dick. "What jolly cats!" She bent down and stroked first one and then the other so that there should be no cause for jealousy. She felt a strange feeling that she knew this place and this little old lady and these cats. It seemed to her that she had been there before.

The little old lady smiled. "You know animals," she said.

"Yes," said Jack, "especially rabbits and bumblebees and squirrels and beetles." He took his place on the hearth rug, putting his feet unconsciously where his father's feet had often been. They fitted the places well, and he looked at his mother and Dick and beamed. It was a great day.

Dick found a chair already placed for her. It was close to the man's chair.

"I have been wondering when Jack was going to bring you," said Lady Euston.

"Have you heard of me, then?" asked Dick.

"Once or twice, my dear."

The mother glanced at her son. There was humor in her eye. Jack's letters, all of which she kept, had been full of many things, but mostly of Dick.

The sun found Dick again. This time he did not



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confine himself merely to her ear and shoulder. He seemed to feel that he was needed.

Lady Euston was very tactful. She talked weather and events. She never once made the tactical error of talking son. She talked to make Dick laugh and liked it. She talked to make Dick talk and liked that. It was boy's talk, a little slangy and altogether free from affectation. She talked to hear what Dick thought about things and liked her views. All around she was very satisfied. Jack's Dick became her Dick, and that was good.

Tea was brought up and there were muffins and hot buns, jam, much bread and butter, and a big cut-and-come-again cake. With it also there was laughter and Jack's continued beam. This was a very great day.

The cats were fed and asked questions, which they answered promptly. They were amazingly intelligent cats, and Dick was delighted to see them drinking out of the same saucer and playing fair. The atmosphere of the room and the house had had its effect even upon them. People who keep dogs turn up their noses at cats. They don't know.

And then Jack said: "Have a look at my room, Dick?"

"Oh," said Dick, "so you've got a room, have you?"

"Yes," said Lady Euston, "full of different portraits of the same woman. Go and see it. But don't forget to come back." The little old lady put on her glasses again and picked up her book.

"A new novel?" asked Dick.

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"No, my dear. At my age one no longer reads, one re-reads." The book was older than herself and was handled affectionately.

Jack led the way, and the way was upstairs. With an air of paternal pride, he opened the door of a room which overlooked the leads and a corner of the stables. It was not a large room, but it was all the better for that. Dick imagined that the walls were papered. It was impossible to tell. There was not one square inch that was not occupied by something in a frame. It was a quaint gallery which told off the years of Jack's life with the closest accuracy. There was Jack a very few feet high on a brick among others of the same height. These were the days of the dame school. There was Jack in his Osborne days—a sturdy little devil he was. Everywhere there was Jack, always sturdy. And between Jack, the various Jacks, there were the various Lady Eustons, not more charming, but certainly not less, than the little old lady who sat below in her husband's room, as though expecting him to walk in at any moment. And side by side with these there were photographs and caricatures and pen and pencil sketches and pictures cut from newspapers of the man who would never return, but who had left his name behind him on the scroll. The Lord knows how many other things there were—pictures of ships, photographs of cricketers, of natives, of coast lines, of the Rock, of the ribs of ships, of A. B. at play, and all the rest of them, duly collected and preserved—milestones. The carpet was warm and the furniture solid, good, honest stuff, well polished and well preserved, as good and

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honest as the house and its occupants and as their record.

Dick examined everything and laughed and chaffed, calling for explanations and making criticisms.

And then finally she caught sight of a clock. "Oh, my hat!" she cried. "Look at the time. With your permission, I appear before the British public to-night, and before that great event I'm to have dinner with mother. Lead the way, Horatio Nelson." She had forced Thoresby out of her mind for the time being. She was a great philosopher.

They went downstairs.

"Good-bye," said Dick. "May I come again?"

"Eaton Square is yours, my dear," said Lady Euston. "Jack, see this dear child safely home. Drive very carefully."

Jack obeyed orders. He drove far too carefully for Dick. She still laughed and chaffed until Jack said: "Oh, by the way, I was seen driving to those chambers in Piccadilly to-day. A man in the service who was at the club lives above them."

"How very interesting," said Dick sarcastically.

"Yes, but it is rather interesting. At least, it's interesting to me. It turns out that there's another feller living there who's going to get a sound thrashing from my brother one of these days. They met in America a couple of years ago and this man, one of the champion wasters of the earth, did my brother out of a very nice sum of money. I suppose *he* called it business. The real word is cheating. The Gilbertian thing about it all is that he is now a peer."

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"Really?" said Dick. "What's his name?"

"Thoresby."

There was a little pause, and in this little pause the car drew up at Park Court. But Dick didn't move.

"Lord Thoresby," she said, "cheat or not, is my future husband."

Jack laughed. It was like Dick to say such a thing. She adored pulling his leg.

"It's no laughing matter," she said.

And then the boy looked at her and saw that her face was laughterless.

"Good God!" he cried. "I don't believe it. *You* the wife of Thoresby. *You!*"

"It's got to be," said Dick. "Did you hear that? *Got* to be."

"I'd rather you were dead," said the boy. "And I wish to God I'd died before you told me."

This was the first wound.

## CHAPTER VII

**T**HE second wound was made by Tony.

It was a very perfect May night. Even in that fusty back alley, prowled along by night birds ever on the search, there was something of the sweetness of the young summer. With his hat on one side and his cigar between his teeth, Tony paced the echoing asphalt outside the stage door of the London Theater. He came in time to see the theater empty itself. He had read all the notices of the new play and expected that all London would be pouring out at the fall of the curtain. Instead, he saw the most curious of all audiences—the second night audience. The beardless boy, usually very fat and something over forty, who wrote for the weekly papers over his signature, carried his stick into the crowd, having worn an almost fresh pair of white kid gloves during the whole performance. If he could find someone to walk away with he talked about values, of which he seemed to know something, and of what was wanted. "If only," was the burden of his song. If he found no one to whom to speak, he sauntered to the nearest tube station, endeavoring to convey the impression that he was a man of independent means, and his head rang with the beginnings of sentences, and all the way

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home to West Kensington he chortled excitedly in anticipation of the chaos into which his almost unread article would throw theatrical beehives. Among the crows were the company's relatives, full of small criticisms as to clothes, and those people who devoted all their lives either to making dresses, wigs, scenery, properties, or upholstery for the theater. The streets of London hardly ever saw them except on second nights. The men wore caps or bowler hats and the women shawls, and they all had about them a slight air of recklessness, and some of them screamed when they crossed the streets, but only in fun. To Tony's immense surprise and annoyance, there was none of that loud and continued shouting as the theater runners brought up huge private motor cars and old-fashioned carriages and pairs. There were no tall, languid women, scantily clad, and no Ouidaesque men who yawned and moved with an effort. And yet all the critics had agreed that the new play was a masterpiece.

Réné de Maingauche came up, nodded to Tony, and asked the stage doorkeeper to send his name up to Miss Okehampton. Sir Edward Morde appeared, evidently having been in front, for he still wore a startled look. He also nodded to Tony, and without paying the smallest attention to the Frenchman sent in his name. And then Thoresby appeared and fell into step with Tony, and in a nervous and wholly uncharacteristic way talked about the weather and the racing and the Italian-Turkish war. They were like bees around a flower, all greedy for honey.

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In the meantime, the young actor-manager, too young to know the value of theatrical criticism, had invited Dick to a supper party at the Savoy to celebrate his great success, and had promised in a royal manner to drive her home afterward. He was very royal, this provincial.

Dick was almost the first of the company to pass the stage doorkeeper's cubby hole. "Hullo, B. P.," she said. "Hullo, Mordy." She divided a smile between them and made her way into the alley. "Oh, hullo, Bill."

The Black Prince followed her. "I thought you'd like——"

Morde touched Dick's elbow. "It would give me the greatest pleasure to——"

"Don't you think," said Thoresby, "that a little supper at the——"

The actor-manager's man hurried out. "Beg pardon, miss," he said, "the guv'nor wishes to know——"

Dick took Tony's arm. "So, so sorry," she said. "I'm engaged to-night."

Tony waved his hand and walked up the alley on the tips of his toes, with his hat at an even more rakish angle and the shoes, which he had polished himself, very radiant in the lamplight. He felt like an undergraduate in his first year who has the honor to be seen talking to the president of the O. U. B. C. B'Jove, Dick was a sportsman! He was a very happy man.

Not quite so happy when he sensed the fact almost immediately that Dick was in a mood. He knew it

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because she walked very quickly and as though she wanted to get home. He was glad to think that she wanted to get home, because it seemed to show that she was not quite so much out of touch with the state of things at the flat as usual. But he was sorry that she walked quickly, because it shortened the hour to which he looked forward all day.

Jack's involuntary words had cut very deep. She had got to marry Thoresby, got to. She knew what she was doing. She had heard her father, during the last of the Quennor days, gloating over Thoresby's masterly wastefulness, but she hated Jack for having even by accident thrown one of the Thoresby incidents into her face. All the same, she knew that Jack was right. She knew it before he put it in his appallingly blunt way. It irritated her to be told what she already knew, and, in any case, she was not a child. She was free to do just exactly what she liked or precisely what she didn't like, as the case may be. She was going to do it. It had to be done. The least said about it the better.

It is an extraordinary thing how often a bad day is made worse by the apparently purposeful piling up of big and little irritations. So far as romance was concerned, Dick owned herself a failure. The word romance did not occur to her. She never used it. It is the sole property of professional wordmongers. But the vague dream, the sort of comforting idea that someday, somewhere, she would meet the man, broke. She was marrying Thoresby solely and entirely to provide her mother and father with things to eat and drink



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and stand up in. She said to herself: "There it is. It's fixed. Nothing can alter it. So let's forget all about it as long as we can."

It was hard luck, however, that the stage manager of the London Theater, the only man in it for whom she had any respect, should have chosen that night of all others for a little friendly talk. He was theater from head to foot. It was generally said that he had been born in the theater. Without any doubt, he would die in it. In a way, he had genius, but he was undersized and ugly and had much difficulty with his h's. He had never had a chance. He knew no one with money. But for the exquisite topsy-turvydom of life he should have been the actor-manager, and for all his ugliness that charming theater would have attracted all lovers of fine acting. As it was, this rapidly aging little man who had played on the sands, on piers, in the fit-ups, in the smalls of Scotland, in the rank melodramas, in the cheap theaters over the water was a sycophant. He was the stage manager of the London Theater at a very small salary who, because he had a wife and a large family in a little house near Camberwell Green, dared not say what he thought and dared not attempt to teach the actor-manager how to act. But he told the truth to Dick, because he liked her, and because he felt that there was a bond of sympathy between them. Curious reasons these for telling the truth. The truth is always so unpleasant.

Dick was standing in the wings. She had just come off after her big scene—that is, the scene in which the actor-manager as the amorous auctioneer kissed her as

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the typewriter in his office. Dealt with by a writer of the new school, this quite commonplace incident was elevated into one of very filthy significance. The stage manager crept up and whispered in Dick's ear. "All wrong, my dear. Absolutely, all wrong. You'll never make an actress. You act. Fatal. You discounted all your effects by being conscious of having them. Can't you get some rich pal to put you in a shop, sweetstuff or millinery? You're wasting your time 'ere. When our young friend wakes up one day and finds that he's lost sixty thousand quid, 'e'll drop the theater like a red-hot potato and you'll never get another job. I'm yer friend, dear. That's why I tell yer these things."

Dick had been enjoying a sort of exaltation. "Beneath her very gaucherie she proved herself to be the possessor of genius." This line had been like champagne to her. "It's ghastly," she said, "how friendly friends are," and turned away full of bitterness and very sore.

And now here was Tony praising her performance in one breath, and wondering whether it wouldn't be better if she did this, that or the other in another.

"Of course, I'm no judge," he said, "so I can't help you at all, but somehow your scene didn't seem to go. I wanted to hear an outburst of applause when you went off. As it was people laughed. Isn't there anyone in the theater to put you right, Dick, old boy?"

"Oh, I've been put right enough," said Dick. "The weasel fastened on me to-night. He's my friend, he is, the weasel. I'm just as useful on the stage, it ap-

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pears, as all the other girls who have been foisted into parts without knowing how to act. Open a paper shop, Tony, for racing tips and let me sell ginger beer to office boys and little clerks."

Tony laughed and tightened his affectionate embrace of her arm. "You're tired, Dick," he said. "I don't wonder. No one could have played the part better than you did, my dear, except an actress. No actor-manager's fool enough to engage actresses, so you're all right. By the way, what's the matter with Thoresby?"

"The matter? What should be the matter?"

"I dunno," said Tony. "He seemed a little quaint, I thought. He talked like a professor of metaphysics and never caught my eye. Something on his mind, I should think."

"There is something on his mind," said Dick. "He's going to get married."

"What!—Bill? No fool like an old fool. Did he tell yer so?"

"No," said Dick, "I told him."

"Don't see it," said Tony. "What is it, a catch?"

"Yes," said Dick, "a wonderful catch for me."

Tony laughed. He didn't know why. He simply laughed in order to cheer up Dick. It really didn't matter at all to him whether Thoresby married or not. Let him marry. It wouldn't make any difference to Tony.

"You'll have to give the bride away, Tony, so polish up your hat, old boy. My daughter, the Countess of Thoresby, you know. Do you a bit of good, what?"

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Tony gave a sort of stagger and stopped. "Do you mean that you—you——"

Dick cursed herself for not having been able to resist this indulgence of wounded ego. "Oh, come on," she said, "come on," trying to turn the matter off.

But Tony's mind went back to the last night at Quennor. He refused to go on. "Dick," he said, "what is this? You've got to tell me. What have you done?"

Dick could see that his face looked very old and white. There was a look in his eyes which she couldn't understand. She gave an airy gesture. "I've done just what any other girl would have done in my place and what tons of others would be jolly glad to have the chance to do. Another actress marries a peer. It's great! I shall have my photograph in the *Daily Mail*."

"Oh, my God!" said Tony. "Why doesn't someone strike me dead?" He said nothing more. He didn't seem able to put any further words together.

He stood staring, with his mouth open.

So Dick hailed a taxicab and helped him into it and drove him to Brewer Street, and gave him brandy and then hurried away. Words were coming back to him, and she had already heard enough for one day, at any rate.

## CHAPTER VIII

**T**HE day was over, but the gods still pursued Dick. They had pursued Tony in the same way just as soon as he came under the influence of Drusilla. To call them gods, therefore, is to use an altogether wrong word. Devils is the one.

All the lights were burning in the flat. A trunk and a dressing-case were in the hall. A green dump hat was lying on the floor and a yellow overcoat lined with blue. Dick heard talking going on in Tony's old room, and when she went into the passage which led to it she saw her mother gliding away, with her dry hair all loose. She wondered why, uneasily. She had not discovered the fact that one of her mother's chief joys in life was eavesdropping.

In the morning-room she found Harry. No one would have believed that she was an English girl. She might have been Spanish with a touch of tar brush. She was lying on a settee in an attitude of utter carelessness. She had green stockings. She had evidently been enjoying herself. For once there was a smile upon her reddened lips and she was talking vividly. A very young, soft-looking, slightly vacuous man was standing with his back to the fireplace. His clothes were pretty and he had wonderful hair, of

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which he was inordinately proud. It was so fair as almost to be white and was full of thick, irrepressible kinks. He could not have been more than twenty-two. He was a stranger to Dick.

"What cheer, Dick!" said Harry. "Looked for you just now and thought you were on the tiles."

"I was rather late at the theater to-night," said Dick.

"Wonder of wonders! You still messin' about among all those people with sheep's heads? Ever met an actress, Kinky? My sister—Lord Kimblestone."

The boy's hand went up nervously to his very beautiful tie. "Oh, how de do?" he said.

"How de do?" said Dick.

"We've just come back from a short stay at Monte Carlo."

The boy blushed violently. "Er, yes," he said, "but we won't go into that. How interesting that you're on the stage," he added to Dick.

Harry simply screamed. "Look at Kinky!" she cried. "Look at him! It's his first trip. You can see that plain enough. Isn't he a fresher?"

"Oh, please, don't," said Kimblestone. "I don't like it. Besides, your sister."

"Don't mind me," said Dick.

Harry was in contortions and became even more careless.

The boy dropped his cigarette into the fireplace. "Well, if you'll excuse me," he said. "I—good-bye." He bowed to Dick and then went over to the settee and touched Harry on the arm. "Good-bye, Harry,"

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he said awkwardly. "Thank you, very much. I mean——"

He got violently red again, looked as though he were in a panic, turned and fled. Dick went to see him out and found him in his startling overcoat and green velvet hat, trying to open the front door. She opened it for him and he bowed again and disappeared.

Harry's laughter rang through the place.

Dick went to her room and shut the door. She was in no mood for Harry. But long before she had begun to undress Harry came in and threw herself on the bed.

"No tender words of welcome for your loving sister to-night, then," she said.

"I'm rather tired, Harry."

The other girl grinned a little unpleasantly. "Yes, but that doesn't prevent your putting on frills with me."

"I don't mean to," said Dick.

"Well, let me give you a tip. Just manage in the future to give me and my pals a less straight upper lip whenever we show up here. We don't trouble you much."

There was no fight in Dick. She felt that she had been knocked out; so she was silent.

This silence seemed to rankle in Harry's queer mind. She sat up and eyed Dick sneeringly. "The difference between you and me," she said, "is that I'm honest and you're hypocritical. You pose as a sort of vestal virgin, and I don't care two curses what people say or think. All the same, don't you imagine that you're

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not talked about, because you are. Oh, there are some jolly stories about you, Godiva. Very jolly! The old man's darling, I've heard you called, and the Black Princess. I suppose you'll say that you're married to one of them secretly so as to be able to buck and put me down one."

"Look here," said Dick. "You can go. I'm fed up. Completely fed up. I advise you to get out, pretty quick."

Harry picked up one of Dick's hats and jerked a feather out. If there had been a cat handy, she would have pulled its tail in the same way. "Your tone," she said, "is offensive. Do you run this place? Is your dirty little salary paying the whack? Bah! You make me tired. This is my show. If I choose to come into your room or anybody else's room, I jolly well will. They've never polluted your ears, I suppose, with the true story?"

"I don't know what you're talking about," said Dick. "But if this is your show and you find me so offensive, you won't have me here much longer."

"Oh? Really?" said Harry. "Are you stepping off your pedestal at last?"

"No," said Dick. "I'm only going to get married, that's all."

"Married? What a scream! Swanky to the last, eh? Never thought you'd turn out like this. Can't have an angel face for nothing, I suppose. Who's the joker?"

Dick thought she heard someone outside the door. What did it matter? "Thoresby," she said.



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Harry sprang to her feet. "My eye!" she said. "That's ripe. The second Mrs. Thoresby. What ho! Going one better than sister Harry, then, eh? You've fixed the gentleman, then, whereas I only had him on a little bit of string. 'Pon my word! This is the joke of the century. To round the whole thing off, I think I'd better be a bridesmaid."

Dick gazed at her open-eyed. "I don't know—what you're talking about," she said.

"Well, then, you're missing the joke, aren't you? Who do you think ran me in the West End after Quennor? Who d'you think paid for my hats and frocks and all the rest of it when you were at Sydenham? Why was Tony able to take this place and furnish it and pay cash for his spats? Blackmail, my child. Little Harry is the benefactor. Dear little Harry."

The door opened and Drusilla came in. Her face was distorted with rage. She was not pleasant to look at.

"You liar!" she said to Harry. "You liar!" She turned to Dick. "Don't believe a word of it. What I told you was the truth. I always tell the truth. You, as Lady Thoresby, will be the benefactor. It will be you to whom your father and I will look for some sort of comfort in our declining years. My darling, what am I to say to you?" She went forward with outstretched arms.

Dick put up her hand. "Stay where you are. Don't touch me!" she said. "It was a trick, a very dirty trick."

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With her nostrils distended and breathing quickly as though she had been running, she got back into her coat and hat, went out of the room and out of the flat, ran downstairs into the dimly-lighted hall, opened the front door, slammed it behind her, and ran down the street until she came to a taxicab.

"Eaton Square," she said. "Quickly! Quickly!"

## CHAPTER IX.

**D**ICK ran from her people. She fled precipitately as people fly from an appalling stench. She went to Eaton Square in the same spirit as that of a fox which runs panting into a church. She, too, felt that she was being hunted. For the first time in her life, her loyalty for her father and mother gave way before the sudden proofs of their depravity. She believed Harry's version of the story. She knew Harry. She remembered her father coming to Half Moon Street. A hundred small things unnoticed at the time were now understood. She never bothered herself to go into details. She accepted things in the true slipshod manner of the Okehamptons, and when Tony had told her after his escape from the flat that he was going to pay his wife eight pounds a week and keep two, it didn't occur to her to ask him where the money was coming from. He had it and that was enough. She now saw that it was Thoresby's money, that it was Harry's flat, and that even her father's rooms in Brewer Street were due to Harry.

So she had been tricked. All the pathos and tragedy of her mother's confession were false. The whole

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thing was a trick. Her mother wanted her to marry Thoresby as a sort of insurance for herself, or else in order that she might have the laugh of Harry. Dick's mind was in too chaotic a state to come to any decision. The only thing that came out very clearly, with the most icy clearness, was that her mother was no mother, that Harry was vile, and that even Tony hadn't the decency to be honest with her. It seemed to her that Thoresby was the only respectable person of them all. He, at least, had had the grace to hesitate. Jack had wished her dead. Tony had wished himself dead. It seemed that death was the only thing that could put her into some sort of comfort.

If she had found any lights in the windows of the house in Eaton Square, she would have knocked, gone up to the large, airy room and crept into the arms of the little old lady. But the house was in darkness. Poor Dick paid off the cab and sat for what appeared to be an hour on the doorstep, with her head against the door. A policeman passed, but she was hidden in the shadow of the early Victorian portico, and it was during this long doubting hour, with the feeling upon her that her friends were cut off, that her mind grew less chaotic and she saw things baldly, unemotionally. In the middle of them stood Tony, poor old Tony, the man who had never grown into a man, and who had been made more childish than ever by trouble. She saw well enough that he, at any rate, depended utterly on her for his spotless clothes, his white spats, his shiny hat, his club, his tidy rooms and all the other

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little toys which now meant so much to him. At any moment Thoresby might go away and cut off the allowance. Would Harry contribute? No. Could she ever hope to earn enough money on the stage to give her mother a roof and keep Tony among his playthings? She had been told the truth about that, and so the answer was no. It became clearer and clearer to her that, although her mother had tricked her and her father had not been honest and Harry owed London to Thoresby, this man Thoresby was to her what the actor-manager was to the poor little stage manager—the means of livelihood. She was one of the numerous sycophants of the earth. She was obliged to marry Thoresby. There seemed to be no way out of it.

She got up, pressed her lips to the door of the house of the little old lady and went down the steps into the street.

"All right then," she said to herself. "Here goes. I'm to be the second Mrs. Thoresby, am I? Right you are. But they shan't have it all their own way, any of them. I'll see to that."

She did not walk in the direction of Knightsbridge. She lilted along with a sort of devil-may-care until she came to Hyde Park Corner. Once before she had tramped this place in the middle of the night. Then it was to escape from law and order and now from anarchy. She hailed a prowling taxicab which was still optimistic. "Bury Street," she said, "like the devil."

She had had enough of cricket for the moment.

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There were other games. She was sick of all the sordid intrigue which surrounded her. She needed amusement. René de Maingauche was an artist in amusement and his day began in the middle of the night.

She found him out. A yawning man-servant told her that he was at a fancy dress ball at Covent Garden arranged in aid of distressed Irish gentlewomen. He gave Dick her first laugh.

"All right," she said, "I'll wait," and it was in an atmosphere that would have been congenial to Drussilla, among the foul creatures of Beardsley's diseased imagination, that Dick revised her plans and changed her mood, smoking like a factory chimney.

René found her lying on a sofa. Her fingers were all stained with nicotine and her eyes tired and reckless. He was dressed as a French Pierrot, his short jacket, much waisted, and his knickerbockers and stockings and limp cloak were silk, dead white, with broad red stripes. A white skull cap fitted closely to his head. No hair could be seen and his face was plastered with white grease paint, with red lips, a dab of red in the corners of his eyes, and eyebrows marked out above his own, which were temporarily removed by the paint. He looked the incarnation of Beardsleyism. He was dangerously sober on champagne and was in the mood for Hell or Heaven. It all depended on his companion. He found that Dick was in favor of the former place, and gave thanks accordingly.

"Wash yourself," she said. "Telephone for the car

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—your chauffeur will only just have got in—and let's go."

"Where?" asked René, stripping off his skull cap and pitching it away.

"To little old man devil," said Dick.

## CHAPTER X

**T**HE curtain of the London Theater rose at half-past eight. There was, according to the system, no one-act play. The curtain fell at a few minutes to eleven, according to the system, and there were two waits of from ten to fifteen minutes each, also according to the system. Within a stone's throw of the London Theater there were four very comfortable, very brilliantly lighted variety theaters which had large and efficient orchestras. Sarah Bernhardt was at one of them, Yvette Guilbert at another, Mascagni at a third, and all of them began at eight o'clock precisely and did not finish until twenty-five minutes past eleven, and at all of them an admirable seat could be obtained for two shillings. There were many other theaters in the neighborhood of the London, all blindly following the system, nearly all, necessarily, full of deadheads—according to the system.

At eight o'clock in the evening of the day upon which Dick and René de Maingauche left London behind them in a mad motor the stage manager of the London Theater began to get nervous. There was no Dick and, according to the system, her understudy had never rehearsed the part.

Mr. Edwin Wilkes first consulted the stage door-



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keeper. "Have you ever known Miss Okehampton as late as this?" he asked.

"Wot? Miss Okehampton? Don't you get jumpy yet, gov'ner. It's all right. In the last piece she was on at twenty to nine and never thought of getting 'ere before eight-thirty-two. Didn't you know that?"

"No," said Mr. Wilkes, who was the stage manager. "But it's different now. Why, damn it! she's playing the lead—the so-called lead. A nice mess up if she let's us down."

"I'll ring her up," said the stage doorkeeper.

"Ah, of course," said Mr. Wilkes. He rubbed his nervous hands together. This was a matter of bread and butter to him.

The servant of Park Court answered the telephone.

"Is Miss Okehampton there?—Yes, Miss Dick—what's that?—not been there all day? Gord bless me!—Well, where can I find her?—You see she ought to be makin' up now. We go up in 'arf an hour."

"Oh, dear! Oh, dear!" said Mr. Wilkes, shocked out of his complete repertory. "Go on! Press it. Press it. She must know something."

"—Yes, I know, miss. Should think it is serious!—What? Yus? Yus. That's it. Ask her mother to ring up 'round about. I shall be 'ere all the time." He rang off.

Mr. Wilkes' hands were wet. He went out into the alley and peered. The theater doors had been opened and a few experimentally minded people had gone in.

The stage doorkeeper joined him. "'Owever," he said, "don't you worry, sir. She's a knockout, that

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Miss Okehampton. We've done two shows, you see, and she'll know 'er times to a second. If I don't stand clear of these 'ere doors about eight-twenty—well, there may be a widder at 'ome. Talk about tropical cyclones!"

It was cheery hearing, but the actor-manager had already begun to realize that the brilliant notices had not caused any pleasant excitement in his box-office. He had already begun to treat Mr. Wilkes as though he were a dog. He remained in the alley, watch in hand.

In and out of the theater beehive passed stage hands, wig people, dressers, understudies and small part people. But there was no Dick.

A chauffeur in livery handed an armful of roses to the stage doorkeeper. "Miss Okehampton," he said, "with Lord Thoresby's comps."

"Eight-ten," said Mr. Wilkes.

A boy messenger whistling "Yiddle and His Fiddle" brought a letter from the Savoy Hotel. "Miss Okehampton," he said, "no answer." It was a pleading note from Sir Edward Morde.

The stage doorkeeper murdered the time for five minutes. Little Wilkes was jumpy, and no wonder. The stage doorkeeper was a kind man.

"Eight-fifteen," said Mr. Wilkes. "If there's a God——"

A fat woman without a hat, dressed in respectable black, suddenly called out to the stage doorkeeper shrilly. "'Ere, what about Miss Okehampton, eh? Gawd love us! And me far from well." She panted

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heavily and seemed to be on the verge of hysterics.

The doorkeeper could no longer remain calm. "Now, look 'ere," he said, "in cases of emergency it isn't for you to 'ave nerves. Get back to your room and 'old up 'er frock for 'er all ready. Go on nar! Off it!"

"Eight-twenty," said Mr. Wilkes, "and the rent due in June."

A telegraph boy came slowly around the corner. He sauntered up to the stage door. "Wilkes," he said.

"Give it here," said Mr. Wilkes. He opened the freshly closed envelope with a hand that trembled violently. He read his sentence to poverty. He knew the actor-manager.

Dear old Wilky most awfully sorry impossible get up fill part chucking footlights.—Dick.

With this, for which surely he could not be held responsible, he went to the actor-manager's very charming dressing-room. It would be cruel as well as unwise to follow him into it.

At half-past nine Jack came up, a new Jack, a Jack with a very straight face, but with determination stamped upon it. "Take this note to Miss Okehampton, will you, please?" he said.

"Now, there you are," said the stage doorkeeper. "Flowers for Miss Okehampton. Note from the Savoy Hotel for Miss Okehampton, and a little epistle from you for Miss Okehampton. And no Miss Okehampton."

"What do you mean?" said Jack.

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"If I were sayin' what I didn't mean, no one would be more thankful. It's put the kybosh on us, I can tell yer! Third night and all! My word, if them as comes to see the plays from the front could see 'arf the dramas that's enacted behind!—Better played, too, some of 'em."

"Come to the point," said Jack.

The stage doorkeeper looked up. He was an old soldier. There was something of the parade in Jack's voice. "Miss Okehampton not forthcoming, sir," he said.

"An accident?"

"No, sir."

"What then?"

"Can't say more than this. A wire came from the young lady at eight-twenty-seven, Greenwich time. I didn't see the context, but I see Mr. Wilkes' face, and since then I've 'ad a word or two with the gov'nor's dresser, who was present."

"Go on," said Jack.

"I'm trying to convey to you, sir, that Miss Okehampton 'as given us the toss and in so doing 'as carted us proper. No fortnight's notice. No attention to rules and regulations, and, what's more, no understudy prepared to take 'er place."

"I can't believe it," said Jack.

"No, sir. Nor yet can I! But, like many things that you can't believe, there it is, as the saying goes. And all you can do is to make the best of it. We've made the best of it by putting on the understudy with the book. Mr. Wilkes—you don't know our Mr.

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Wilkes, do yer? Well, sir, poor little Wilkes is drownin' 'isself in a quick succession of double whiskeys. It's a 'ard life and there's no place as I knows of as'll insure yer against it."

Jack left the stage door, but not the alley. For half an hour he walked up and down with his hands behind his back. He saw stage hands come out and heard them talking. "Miss Okehampton—Miss Okehampton."

All the same he went back to the stage door and looked the fat man straight in the face. "Is this true?"

"If I never speak another word on——"

Jack was at the top of the alley and into a taxicab before it gives ordinary people proper time to say Jack Robinson. He drove to his club and went into the telephone box, found Antony Okehampton in the book and asked for his number.

He was answered by Harry and heard himself called Horatio Nelson. No, she knew nothing. That is, she knew nothing definitely. The maid had been rung up by the theater and later she, Harry, had spoken to the stage doorkeeper. It was perfectly true that a telegram had been received from Dick resigning the part. It happened that Kinky—Lord Kimblestone, you know—kept his motor in the same garage as the Black Prince—"Réné de Maingauche, if you remember." His man told Kinky's man that he had taken his master's car around to Bury Street at four in the morning, and that the young lady who went away in it looked very much like Miss Dick Okehamp-

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ton. Small world, isn't it, Horatio? Harry would like to know where Horatio lived. She would send him any further bulletins.

Jack rang off. On top of her engagement to Thoresby one man told another that the young lady who went away in the motor of that poisonous little scoundrel, half Frenchman, half nigger, looked like Miss Dick Okehampton—Dick, his Dick, because, of course, she would never have been Thoresby's Dick or anybody else's Dick. He would have seen to that. He left the club again, hailed the first taxi, got into it, and said: "Drive to——"

Where? Where was he to drive? Dick was not at home, not at the theater. Not only all London, but all England, seemed to stare him in the face. Drive where?

He gave the man a shilling, left his cab and went back to the club. He sat down in the smoking-room, pulled himself together with a supreme effort and began to put himself through a series of searching questions, to none of which was he able to find any answer.

There were several men in the room, men who had dined and who could find no attraction elsewhere. Among them was Gerald Arbuckle. This was the man who had lowered his right eyelid at Jack yesterday afternoon. He came up. He was a well-meaning enough person on the whole, but he made his mistakes.

"Oh, hullo!" he said. "You don't use this place much, do you?"

"No."

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'Bit Georgian, isn't it?"

"Is it?"

"Don't you think so?"

"No."

"Oh, well, let's talk about the weather."

"As a matter of fact, I'm not in the mood for talking."

"Oh, right. Then I'll take it on. I'm an excellent monologist. Oh, by the way, have you heard that Charlie Stancourt, who was with us at Osborne, has chucked the navy—or that, properly speaking, the navy has chucked him? Silly ass, he went and married a girl in the fourth line at the Gaiety. Married, you know! Think of it. So unimaginative. You and I find attractions on the stage, of course. Why not? I have the honor of presenting bon-bons to a really topping little bit of fluff who shows her teeth in a musical comedy, and, by Jove, I envied you yesterday when I saw you wheeling Dick Okehampton 'round the town. I've been endeavoring to get an introduction to her for a long time. She's generally said to be quite the most cayenne pepper pot we've got. How did you manage to get her away from that Franco-Indian? He's been running her to the exclusion even of old Morde for quite a considerable time. They call her the Princess at Doddy's."

Jack got up, let out a true and splendid left with all his weight behind it and dropped the excellent monologist full stretch upon the floor. It was good.

Members came up and waiters. It was an altogether unheard-of thing. With his hands in his

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pockets and a most almighty rage in his heart, Jack stood with his back to the fireplace until the man with the interesting tongue was picked up and brought back to a sore and surprised consciousness.

"You will apologize, of course," said a man.

"I have nothing to add," said Jack. "Make your complaint to the committee and I'll pick out one of the other clubs to which that damned lying little dog doesn't happen to belong. Good-night."

And again Jack went into the streets.

One man had told another that the young lady in the car looked like Miss Dick Okehampton. And the car was driven by the Franco-Indian, the Black Prince, René de Maingauche.

Perhaps, then, Dick would be more grateful to him if he didn't find her. And with that hideous thought in his brain, that inconceivable feeling of doubt eating into his mind like a maggot, Jack plunged like a drunkard into the crowd. Not intentionally he found himself at last in Eaton Square, but not to go up to his mother's room. There were things on his lips about men and women, himself and Dick, that would hurt her too much to hear. But he went into the house and crept up to his own room, crept out again, went around to the old-fashioned stabling, ran his car out, and as he drove away there was something in his pocket which might break a heart.



## CHAPTER XI

**T**HE following morning at eight o'clock a powerful and excellent car was driven into the garage of the Union Hotel, Leamington. It was white with dust. It was as dusty as the boot of a careless tramp. The driver and his companion, both in thick overcoats, were as dusty as the car. The girl's golden hair was white and so were her eyelashes. In her hand she swung a small hat, which looked like a little basket as she got stiffly out, laughing a little, and shaking herself. The man, whose temples were white, banged his cap on his knee. The rest of his hair was black as the back of a raven.

"A topping run," said Dick. "Nothing would make me stop now except petrol and hunger."

"Hunger!" said René. "One ought to invent a new word for it. I'm prepared to give anyone a fiver for a pot of hot coffee. I mean coffee."

Dick looked at the hotel. So far as the servants were concerned, it was all alive. She sized the place up. "A seven and sixpenny bed and breakfast touch this, I fancy," she said. "Don't be reckless with fivers. We may want them."

René went around the car and up to her, standing close. "*Tu m'ereintes les entrailles!*"

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"Er—thank you very much," said Dick, "the same to you. One of these days when I know French I'll tip you a stave or two. Eggs, I think. About six, what? And warm bread. Make it so, B. P., will you?"

"I'll take rooms," said the Frenchman.

Dick touched him on the arm. "Just one moment, cockie," she said. "The following are the orders for the day."

"Orders? *Sapristi!*"

"I said orders, oh, my heart. Having breakfasted and done themselves well, the flying column will then re-car themselves, and, having laid in as much petrol as they can carry, will tear the roads up, with small intervals for eating, until they reach the sea, any old sea. They will then cross that sea and go on tearing up roads *ad lib* till further orders, and when petrol is no longer to be obtained they will try eau de Cologne, ginger beer, or Bass's ale. What price a wash?"

The Frenchman laughed, gleefully. He was very good-looking. "All right, then," he said. "Let's meet in the coffee-room as soon as may be."

And when presently, with hair now altogether black and without his overcoat, he found the coffee-room, after maneuvering with dust pans and brushes and curious-eyed cleaners, Dick was standing at the window beating a devil's tattoo upon its sill.

"What is this place?" she asked.

"Oh, there you have me!" said the Frenchman. "I'll ask."

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"No, don't," said Dick. "It's rather a joke not to know. It's England, at any rate. Look at that tablecloth."

Having rolled down his shirt sleeves and slipped into his coat behind a screen, a waiter came forward. "You vish——"

"Quite right," said Dick, "and add to that coffee, lots of it, and a dozen eggs, not too floppy, and see that the bread's warm." She turned to the Frenchman. "How do you say, buck up, you little blighter, in Swiss?"

Réné surprised the waiter with these words: "*Re les pattes, sacré petit con, ou je vous rends ennugue d'un seul coup!*"

The waiter gasped and backed away. "*Oui, oui, mossieu! de ce pas!*" He ran from the room. It was good to hear his language spoken so fluently, but just as well, perhaps, to put some distance between himself and one who was evidently a surgeon.

Dick's hair was golden again and her eyelashes dark. "I feel years younger, already," she said. "The air has swept away all the reek of London."

The Frenchman stood with his back to the window and toyed with a button on Dick's coat. "Tell me, what is all this? From what are we running away? Or, would you rather not?"

"I'd rather not, thank you," said Dick, shortly. "As a matter of fact, I don't intend to remember that there is such a place as London on the map until I have to go back."

"Ah! you have to go back?"

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"Well, what do you think?"

"How can I think? You do not give me a cue. You ask me, I say forget London, always. There is Paris. There are Vienna, St. Petersburg, Venice, Oporto, Buenos Aires——"

"I don't know *when* I go back," said Dick, "but when I do it's to hear Mendelssohn's Wedding March. That's all for the present."

The Frenchman's fingers closed upon the button. "You are to be married," he said. He whistled softly and nodded several times. "I see. Oh, yes, I see. The last fling, eh? If it is Morde, I can understand. Not Morde? Who, then? You are not saying Good. It does not matter. It was kind of you to think of me. I will see that your fling is one to which you will look back with the eye of an artist. It is good work for me."

"I intend to put in the time of my life," said Dick grimly. "Look at your Swiss. He's laying the table like a conjuror. If we don't watch it, he'll be throwing up a knife, a fork and a chair. He's exactly like that man at the Palace."

"Every man in England and every man in Switzerland is alike," said René. "It is their native music which does its work in their youth."

An hour later, in a car which some unimaginative person had cleaned to admiration, the breakfasters returned to the road.

"The orders are?"

"Any old sea," said Dick. "Let her go."

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Another stop was made about one o'clock. The car was hot when it drew up in front of an hotel. A superb sun had blazed on it as it had gone singing along the winding, dead-white roads. The clerk of the weather was in what may be called an Okehamp-ton mood. After an April of icy winds and down-pours of hail, he had turned on almost tropical weather. There had been no rain for a fortnight. The earth was in hard lumps and cracks everywhere. Farmers who had complained bitterly of the wet complained more bitterly of the dry. It is as difficult to find an uncomplaining farmer as a pearl in an oyster shell. The roads through which Dick and the Frenchman rushed just for the joy of movement were full of very grateful men and women—the men and women who seem mysteriously to disappear in the winter and to come forth at the first touch of sun to get brown to the tips of their ears, to sit in hedges and patch their tatters and doctor their boots and cast glances of quiet amusement and pity upon farm laborers and those of their foolish brethren who worked. They and the swallows appear together and disappear at the same time.

Dick's wounded soul was not yet healed sufficiently to let her take any joy in birds and trees. She urged the Frenchman on and had only one desire—to get away, to leave everything and everyone behind her, to go forward quickly, it didn't matter where.

Very little talking was done by these two. The Frenchman had a passion for Dick, but a deep-seated love for himself. Added to these, he was a most ad-

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mirable driver. He went, but he went with his eyes open and paid attention to warnings.

Once again two dusty figures got out of the car and stretched their legs and blinked at each other.

"What do you think?" asked Dick. "I'm all for something thoroughly English and chunky. Roast beef and Yorkshire pudding, potatoes in their jackets, something suety to follow, all over currants, a hunk of bread and cheese and an almighty pot of beer. That's me, B. P."

"H'm! I wish that I felt strong enough for it. It might not kill me, but it would certainly give me an incurable disease—a corporation on the brain or something. I think I will run the car 'round to the garage."

"Why?"

"Well, we may stop here, perhaps."

"What do you mean, stop?"

"Remain, put up, stay for the night."

"Wh-at! Here? Where's the sea? Where's the steamship to take us across? Where's anything? My dear B. P., I hope you've not fallen into the sere and yellow?"

The look that the Frenchman used as he ran his eyes over Dick was not that of an old man. "Why? What is it?"

"Well, it's a rotten memory, yours. Must I repeat the orders of the day? The flying column halts just long enough to restoke and then on! On, Macduff, and damned be he who first cries hold! Enough!"

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She struck an attitude. How extraordinarily she resembled Tony at that moment, Tony, the undergraduate!

The Frenchman shrugged. "I am yours," he said. "Do what you will. My turn comes later."

So the car was left on the gravel drive outside the hotel, a rather smart hotel, with a line of miniature trees in tubs and a blaze of geraniums in white tubs with brass handles. Neither Dick nor René troubled to ask its name or the name of the place.

The dining-room was cool, airy and civilized. There were several men, unmistakably infantry officers, having lunch. They all stared at Dick as she entered, but said nothing until they saw her companion, when they laughed, and an imperceptible change took place in their expressions.

Dick had her roast beef and Yorkshire pudding and the rest of it. The Frenchman potted with a chicken, amazed to find himself so excited. There was to be no recurrence of the Brighton episode. Once was quite enough of that sort of thing. But his curiosity was all alive. To marry! Whom? He was unable to keep himself away from the subject.

"Try this beer," said Dick. "It's quite it." She held out the bottle.

"For Heaven's sake!" cried the Frenchman. He snatched away his glass. "Tell me," he said, "who is it?"

"Bass," said Dick. "I hate beer as a rule, and I would generally run a mile to leave beef well behind me. To-day they're right, just as you are."

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"And you would usually run a mile away from me?"

"No. Put it down at a hundred yards. One has one's day for you, B. P. Jolly good thing it doesn't come too often. Forgive my engaging frankness, won't you?"

"I'll forgive you everything," said the Frenchman, "so long as I have my day." He touched her fingers expertly when handing her the potatoes.

She smiled at him. "You're very good-looking," she said, "and really a bit of a knight, but may I offer you one other piece of criticism?"

"Please."

"Be a little more cheery, B. P., a little less full of quotations from songs, English drawing-room songs. They don't go well with dust and daylight. Do you take me?"

The Frenchman bowed and showed his teeth. He was incredibly amenable. He was almost as sycophantic as little Mr. Wilkes. And for the rest of the meal he made phrases about everything and applied a well-manipulated lash to people and institutions. He kept Dick in constant laughter. And then coffee came.

"In the sun," said Dick, "I think I'm going to smoke a cigar."

"Oh, no, no!"

"I'm doing everything differently to-day," said Dick. "You know cigars. Let me have one that's fit for you to smoke."

To the horrified amazement of two or three local ladies, of the bureau clerk and a flyman sitting hunch-



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ily on his box—taking care not to lay his hand upon his hot roof—Dick went solidly through a thin Corona and enjoyed it. “You see,” she said very quietly, “this is the end. I suppose I feel rather like a person who’s going to commit suicide. It amuses me to take risks. One has a sort of feeling that it doesn’t matter. Hey, ho!” She stretched herself and yawned widely. “Poor little old devil Wilkes,” she said. “I hope I shall have enough ready to run to a small pension for him. He’s out, if I know anything.”

“Wilkes? Who is that?”

“Doesn’t matter,” said Dick. She got up. “The column will now advance. Up you get, B. P. No slacking!”

With his hand on the throttle, the Frenchman turned to Dick. “Who is he?” he asked.

“The Lord of Thoresby, an’ it pleases you.”

“*Crenom*—Now, I see. How wise of you, my dear Dick, to provide yourself with a beautiful memory to take with you into the winter.”

“Very, very hot!” said Dick. “Very hot.”

\* \* \* \* \*

The sea seemed to have dried up. The sun had gone down behind a blurred blue line. The sky he left behind was slit like the sleeve of a doublet and patched with red and gold.

“Keep on going,” said Dick.

She stopped and sniffed and put her hand to her ear.

“Well?” asked the Frenchman.

“What rot!” said Dick. “We seem to have missed

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it. According to geographies, you only have to go far enough straight ahead to find sea somewhere. Can't make it out. You must have been jolly careless, B. P."

"Quite right, quite right," said René. "Put it down to me. One of these days, as you see, I shall make a model husband. However, say the word, and if there's another night to go through on the road, very well."

"I can't stand injured people," said Dick. "Pull up. No little old men martyrs for me, thanks." She hailed a passer-by. "Hi! Is there a decent hotel anywhere about here? Straight on into the High Street, second large building on the left. First's the post-office."

They found it. It was not a very large building, but it was well enough. The Frenchman thanked his gods for it. He did not wish to see a motor car again for a month.

"Do we stay here," he asked.

"You're beginning to ask superfluous questions, Prince—or am I tired? Sorry. I find I'm tired."

There was a marvelous smile on the Frenchman's face as he put in to the garage over the cobblestones over which had once clattered the hoofs of stagecoach horses. All the old stalls were empty.

\* \* \* \* \*

Dick, with gleaming hair, stood in front of an oleograph of the late Queen Victoria. It hung over the mantelpiece, the tasseled mantelpiece, between a photographure of a line of chubby children on a gate and a

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photograph of the lake district. Several incandescent lights were burning blazingly—one of them with a sort of song. A round table in the middle of the room was covered with a bilious tablecloth, and there was a horsehair sofa under the window, very hard and prickly. The chairs were arranged as though for a Bible meeting, stiffly, along the wall, and beneath the window the incessant tong of electric tram cars disturbed the night.

A little mountain of cigarette ends was piled in a saucer. Dick lit another. A very musical old clock somewhere near told all its people that it was only an hour before bedtime. A cool air came into the room. Somewhere down below there was intermittent laughter and a swing door opened and shut often. When it opened a click could be heard as though something hard were hitting something else that was hard. Sometimes there was a double click. A man somewhere in the street was playing a tin whistle abominably with that peculiar note of sentimentality which belongs to music halls. He must have been an old soldier. People were passing, most of them in the middle of the road, slowly, saying very little. The raucous voice of a man outside a moving picture palace shattered the air incessantly.

Dick hated the place and the hotel and the noises. She had wanted the sea. There is a moment in the lives of all women when the sea becomes painfully necessary. She hated this pause. She had begun to hate herself. It was all intensely irritating. She had known that this feeling would come sooner or later,

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and that's why she wanted to keep going on and on at top speed, passing things without being able to examine them, doing the next best thing to flying. Even René had begun to irritate, and once he really did irritate she might as well go back.

She turned to him as he came in. "You've been away an hour," she said. "Why? Where? What do you mean by it?"

The Frenchman had left her alone on purpose. He had thought it out. "You were beginning to bore me a little, my child," he said. "I have been in the garage, finding solace with an industrious but sloppy cleaner."

Dick laughed. This was exactly what he wanted to bring about. "You're really rather attractive," she said, "in a sort of way. Any suggestions to make? Is there a music hall in this place? There's a billiard table downstairs. No. Scratch it."

"There is nothing to be done. We are in the provinces of England. In a moment or two lights will go out and lethargic life will begin to flicker like a cheap candle."

"Very lively," said Dick. "'Pon my soul! There is the last resource."

"What is that?"

"Sleep."

René crossed the room and opened the door. It was a bedroom. An incandescent light burned whitely over a dressing table. There were brushes upon it with large silver initials. There was a bottle of hair tonic. An empty shirt case was on a chair.

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Dick strode across the room like a boy and put her head around the corner of the door. "Why is it that these rooms always suggest Sunday? Scrupulously fuggy," she said.

Réné did not wish to appear too eager. He was playing upon a difficult instrument. "And yet the window is open, I think," he said.

"My dear feller, the fug of this place is at least three layers thick on the walls. They paste on a new layer every spring. Well, there it is—I notice that you've provided yourself with everything, Your Highness. How do you say in French, as for me I stand up in all that I have?"

The Frenchman laughed. "Do not let us waste time," he said.

"Oblige me by saying it. No, don't say it. Oh, Lord, I'm getting bored. I'm getting fed up. Damn! Do you know what'll happen if you don't amuse me in about ten shakes?"

"What?"

"Out'll come the car and back we shall go to London."

It was difficult to be amusing under the circumstances. What *was* he to do with this erratic child—this child who was in his blood!

"I'm going to bed," he said. "You can go back to London if you like."

He went into the bedroom and shut the door.

In an instant his ear was at the keyhole. Would she go? Dared he treat her like that? *Crenom!* He had read descriptions of salmon fishing. How easy

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in comparison—there was no sound. No one left the room. He undressed, flinging his clothes into a chair pell-mell and then stood in a suit of light blue silk pajamas and did his hair over and over again. Well, he was always searching for new experiences. Perhaps Dick was a little too new. He told himself that if he asked her, ordered her, besought her, she would laugh in his face. Very well. He would pretend not to need her, to care nothing. She was not in a mood for loneliness. She would follow.

But no one knew Dick. Not even Dick. She had left London on the top of an impulse. She gave no thought then and just as little thought now to the Frenchman. He had fitted her mood and she had taken him. There it began and ended.

“Touchy!” she said. “Very touchy!”

She looked about the room for an inspiration. It was a queer place from which to obtain inspirations. She saw a book, a bulky, solemn-looking book standing alone upon an occasional table. She opened it. It was a Bible. “By Jove,” she said, “a Bible! I wonder what——”

She picked it up, twisted an armchair into a convenient place, sat down, put her toe under another chair, pulled it nearer and put her feet on it. She had never read the Bible and had never listened when it was read. The Prince could go and hang himself.

\* \* \* \* \*

That man in the room alone paced up and down like a sort of tiger. He heard eleven strike and twelve.

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Oh, those good hours that slipped away! Again and again he put his ear to the keyhole and heard nothing. She was there. What was she doing? To go in was weakness, to stay outside madness. The Frenchman in him argued him out. The Indian compelled him to stay. The Frenchman made him want to go and fling himself at her feet, to pour out broken infatuated sentences, to make a fool of himself. The Indian made him devise in his mind a series of cunning punishments. She ought to be made to pay for this. The man in him sent him to the door, caused him to fling it open and walk into the sitting-room choking with inarticulate anger.

He saw a girl reading—absorbed, a heavy book lying against her knees.

*"Mon Dieu,"* he said, "what is this?"

"S-sh!" said Dick.

"But what is it?"

"A fairy tale," said Dick, "the most beautiful thing I ever read. Go away."

The Frenchman went over to her and looked over her shoulder. His eyes grew wide. For a minute or two he spluttered, half laughing. "My soul!" he said, "but you kill me. The Bible, here! and in these circumstances! You make me feel as though I were standing on my head in mid-air."

"Oh, please be quiet," said Dick. "I never can read when people jabber. What do you want? There's your bed. I'm all right."

"You—are all right. But I!" He slapped his chest. "God! I'm not all right. I'm all wrong."

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Damnation, why do you think I've brought you here? What have you come for? I'm not a clergyman—No, no, no! Don't listen to me."

"I'm not," said Dick.

The man almost danced. "But you *must!*" he shouted. "You must! That room there is a lunatic asylum. I've been shut up for two hours. No creature can stand it. Dick! For God's sake!"

But Dick hunched herself more closely into the chair and went on reading. The lilt of the lines was music. She was absorbed.

The Frenchman walked about and bit his lips and ruffled his hair and stood and gazed at her. Then he tried to laugh. "Ah, yes, I see," he said, "a joke, eh? One of Dick's jokes. Oh, very good! Very excellent!"

He got no answer.

He paced again. Even mentally he began to lose his English accent. He began even to lose his power of translating French into English. There were so few words in English. He sprang. "Yes, but even jokes can go too long! *Sacré, bon Dieu!* I am done! I am finished." He snatched the book away and flung it on the table.

Dick was on her feet. "That book, please," she said, "quick!"

The man stood in front of her. Every finger throbbed. "Dick! Dick!" he said. "Oh, my God! Dick! You tease me. You madden me. It is late. Will you not come?"

"That book," said Dick, "quick!"



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"That book must wait. I have waited—I! Like any lad, I have danced after you for months, avoided you because you killed me. This is my hour. You said so. Be generous!"

"That book!" said Dick.

There was a sort of cry. The book was caught up and given back and a door banged.

A moment later the white light fell on a golden head and on wide pages and two hands with long thin fingers.

\* \* \* \* \*

The musical clock struck one. The bedroom door opened. The Frenchman came in quietly. His face was perfectly white and his eyes bloodshot. He said: "Just listen."

But Dick went on reading.

He bent forward and tapped her on the shoulder. "I said, just listen. Do you hear?"

Dick looked up. She had been thousands of miles away. "Oh," she said, "it's you. Yes?"

"Yes. It's me. Still me. There is a word for you. A not very pleasant word. One minute. There's time to read that book later. Just tell me this. Did you start out meaning to put me through this? You saw me pack. You chose this place for the night. What did you mean?"

Dick looked startled. She saw that the man was in some sort of trouble. She tried to concentrate. She repeated his words. "What did you mean?—What did *I* mean? But, good Lord, you know me. I didn't mean. I don't mean. I just *do*. The door

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in Eaton Square was shut. The lights were out. I thought of you. You might be up. You're always up. Everyone else was sleeping. No one seemed to care. Without meaning anything I asked you to come because I had to go, *had* to! Is it *that*? It is that Brighton thing?" She got up and put the book down on the table. "No, no. I can't help it—I am not a woman—yet. There it is. You can't alter it. I'm afraid I—I hope I haven't—I'm sorry. I wish I did mean. But we don't mean, any of us. I mean any of the Okehamptons. We just *do*. Someone put a jetta on us."

For many minutes the Black Prince looked straightly at her. The face before him was like a flower, fresh and young and clean—and the eyes were empty.

He bowed and shrugged his shoulders several times and made queer little gestures with his hands. "Read as much more as you can of your book," he said, "while I dress myself. In fifteen minutes I will do myself the honor of taking you back to the man who is going to marry you. His future life will repay me."

\* \* \* \* \*

The night was clear. No word passed between the people in the car. Their mental attitudes were now reversed. It was no longer Dick who wanted to go fast. It was the Frenchman. His lights were powerful, but, except in certain places, almost unnecessary. A full moon lighted everything. Houses cast their shadows across the street. On the London road the Frenchman did not spare his car. He raced the devils

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that were in his brain, especially the one who seemed to be flying alongside him with lips to his ear. "What, expert, you're going to let yourself be beaten by this slip of a girl! Where's your imagination? You'll never have the chance again. Never!" But René de Maingauche was too much Indian to risk being made a greater fool than ever. All he wanted to do was to get back, set this girl down and never see her again. She had ceased to be amusing.

He was relieved to find, on making inquiries at the garage, that he made a sort of circle from Leamington. Breakfast time would see him into London. He sat as far away from Dick as he could. He detested her. This was the second time that she had tricked him.

Strange things were going through Dick's head. She had not lived under the Okehampton roof for nothing. Life had no secrets for her, and death had not seemed to be a mystery until that evening. There were many things in the book that puzzled her, new things, rather nice things. Inwardly she agreed with the Frenchman. He had a grievance. Were there no men in the world who could forget that a girl was a girl? None. Yes, one. Jack had forgotten. At least he made himself forget. Dear old Jack. What a corker! But this Frenchman—she would never forget his face. It was time that she began to mean things. That was very evident. In fact, it was time for her to force herself into becoming a woman. It was not London that lay ahead of her. It was Thoresby; not London and its restaurants, its rehear-

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sals, its evening performances, its home walks with Tony, its interludes with Morde and the rest. It was Thoresby. She had signed an agreement with the actor-manager. He had hired her services for certain hours of the day at such and such a price. This agreement was easily broken. Not so the Thoresby agreement, under which she hired herself to him at such and such a price for all the hours of the day. With a sort of laugh she told herself that she was in luck. Not many girls walked from one engagement to another. She would never make an actress, said Mr. Wilkes. A good deal of acting would have to be done in the future. She was cast for the part of a happy and contented wife. What sort of a man was Thoresby?—

Well, after all, what did it mean? Mean. It was a new word. It meant something perhaps better than Brewer Street for Tony and the certainty of white spats, shiny hats and glossy shoes. It meant a roof for her mother and later the possibility of bread and butter for Harry. A red-hot needle went in and out of her heart, dragging behind it a thread of pain as she thought of these three and how they had used her. If only Tony had been honest! Nevertheless, they were hers, her people, and the ineradicable loyalty of her nature sent her straight to Thoresby. God only knew whether, after all, she would be able to play the game of cricket according to the rules. And when she said the word God to herself it was not the word which had been so often on her lips. It was not the God of Quennor. It was the new God

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in this book, the book she had called a fairy tale, and which she had left unfinished, very much unfinished.

The actor-manager had one day called her ignorant because she had been unable to pronounce the word idiosyncrasy. How should she know how to pronounce it? There had been no schooling at Quennor. Nothing had been taught at Quennor except to obtain just that thing that was required at the moment somehow or other, generally in the latter manner. Ignorant. It was a curious word. And yet she knew life backward. She wondered what would have happened to her if she had known it the other way around. She would ask the Frenchman what he meant by the unpleasant name. No. She wouldn't—and mile by mile Thoresby came nearer. What sort of a man was Thoresby?

\* \* \* \* \*

There were hills now. One was so high that she felt as though she were in a star looking down on the earth. She had often looked up from the earth to the stars. Her breath was blown away as the car sang down the hill unbraked, every now and then with a leap. It was going too fast. Thoresby was at the other end. Once she touched the Frenchman on the arm—she, Dick, who had always begged for speed. He had jerked her finger away and they wound up the long white road into a sort of ball. And then there was something friendly in the country. She thought that the trees waved their arms at her and

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that the hills came to meet her. It was curious. They must have gone along this way as they had left London. She had not noticed.

There was something in the road. It looked like a black pin stuck into a winding white ribbon. She could see it from the hill, at the bottom of which the road turned abruptly. Someone telling his troubles to the stars, she thought. They might pass him. They must pass him. He was on their road. She would look out for him at the time.

The car dipped like a swallow. Again they wound up the ribbon. But this time too near to its edge. As the car swept around its rear wheels twisted in and out of the great dry ruts in the chalk. The corner was taken on the turf ridge divided from a rolling field of corn by a ditch and a hedge. The rear wheels bumped over something, not ruts.

"Stop!" cried Dick. "It's the speck." She clutched the Frenchman's arm.

He snorted and threw it off. "A damned man!" he said. "What then? What's it matter?"

It did matter. Something in Dick's heart seemed to open. It went utterly cold. It did matter. But the car rushed on.

"Stop! Stop!" she cried. "You *must* stop!"

The Frenchman snorted.

"You *shall* stop!" shouted Dick, the air taking her voice up and tossing it away like a leaf.

"Not again do I obey your orders, my precious!" said the Frenchman. And so Dick turned in her seat. It mattered. Something had opened in her heart. She

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put her fingers around the Frenchman's throat and brought them all together.

The car wobbled like a drunken man. There was a grinding of tires. The Frenchman cursed and coughed and Dick sprang out.

For a moment she stood still, asking herself what it was, why she did this? And in that moment she heard a laugh and jeer and then saw the small red eye of the car recede and grow smaller and smaller, and as it went it seemed to take the word Thoresby away with it—out of her mind and her life.

Dick went back. She ran back. They had gone over a man. It mattered. Something had opened in her heart.

It was all crumpled up and still, a dark patch on the green. Dick was on her knees. It mattered. It mattered. She turned it over and the moon fell deliberately on a white face all twisted.

"Jack!" she cried, "Jack!" and fell upon his lips.

\* \* \* \* \*

Was the jetta that had been laid upon Tony to break the lives of both his children? A miracle had happened. Yes, it was a miracle and nothing else. How could it be anything else which made this girl who loved no one turn back?

It was a speck on the road, a man who failed to keep his ears open, who asked to be run down, a mere damned man, as the Frenchman had called him. What other word is there for the thing that opened her heart suddenly, unexpectedly, except love, which is a

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miracle? What was it, that which took her back to just the one man, loving him, and made a thing of him all crumpled? The jetta?

Not for a single instant did the mere thought of this thing, this Quennor thing, enter her brain. Jack *couldn't* be dead. She loved him. He loved her. Think of him in the Crystal Palace, on top of the hill, and with his mother. In all the history of the world, in every chronicle of lovers, there had been no love like his. There should and could be no love like hers.

She called him and put her cheek against his shoulder, against his cheek. She picked up his limp hands and kissed them. She said things that he would have thrilled to hear and trembled to believe. But she got no answer, no sign, nothing. Dick had found her man at the outpost of eternity. He might never return.

She became frightened. She called him loudly like a mother. She even shook him. He wasn't dead. He couldn't be dead. She had been reading of miracles in the book. This was a miracle. But he never moved and his eyes never opened and when she lifted his arm it fell with a thud.

She put her ear to his heart, the heart in which she was, her own heart. A great glad cry was caught up by the breeze and sent all among the anxious branches of the Quennor trees, her trees. She knew that he couldn't be dead.

She went on her knees, almost on her face. She edged herself beneath him. She put one of his arms around her neck and with a mighty effort struggled



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to her feet, catching his other loose arm, and so she had them both. He was like a great sack on her back. In front of her lay the long white road and the world asleep. Without any surprise she recognized Quennor. At the end of the road lay the little town in a hollow. All its eyes were shut. This was *her* hour. Jack had come to her at Sydenham. She was his, then. Now he was hers. Let the road be twice as long and she would carry him gladly, gladly. There were miracles in the book. This was a miracle. This was love.

On she went without a stagger—this high-strung, unexercised, over-smoked, tired girl whose very soul had been on the rack, whose purity had almost been stained. Bit by bit the long white road fell behind her. There was the white gate. There was the place where her dog had set on a chicken and broken its back. In a line with her now there was the farm where the old man lived with a face like a dried pippin or a fig.

Bit by bit the little town came nearer. She could see the white tower of its church glistening in the moonlight. She thought she heard the clock over the market-place strike the hour. Within a stone's throw of this place there was the doctor's house.

A cock crowed. He was answered from right and left, near and far.

She wondered what they meant by crowing.

And as she struggled on, step by step, there was a song in her heart. It had opened to take Jack in and closed again.

\* \* \* \* \*

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This time she heard the clock. Her heart still sang, but all her limbs were trembling. Another yard, another foot and she must fall. Her heart thumped and perspiration ran down her face. But if Jack couldn't die, she couldn't. This was a miracle. This was love.

She stood in front of the doctor's door. There were a knocker and a bell. She kicked the door. It was all that she could do. She kicked it and cried out. Her voice was hoarse and faint. Again and again she kicked. Was this a city of the dead? Another instant and she must join them. If she went, Jack must go, for this was love.

A window opened. A voice came. "What is it?" The man used his eyes, left the window open, almost fell downstairs and opened the door in time to catch Dick in his arms, Dick, and the thing that fell away from her and lay at her feet, all crumpled.

## CHAPTER XII

ONE morning toward the end of June, and a good June, as Tony Okehampton was polishing his shoes with a sort of velvet rag which was not a rag and whistling to himself because there was a letter in a big round school-boy fist on his dressing-table, his old lady came up and tapped at the door. "Come," said Tony, polishing heartily and whistling with gusto because the letter on the dressing-table was the first that he had had for considerably over a month.

The old lady came in. "Oh, it's a shame!" she said. "You a-cleaning of yer own boots."

Tony roared with laughter, and it was the first time that he had roared with laughter or even smiled for considerably over a month because the hand that had written that letter had had a pulse in it very difficult to feel. "Don't mind me," said Tony. "I'll clean your boots every morning if you don't look out. What is it, Mrs. Pearson?"

"It's a young person, sir, she calls 'erself a young lady, which I don't believe, and she wishes to see you."

"Well," said Tony, "show her up, my dear Mrs. Pearson. Show her up. I don't clean my shoes in the sitting-room."

"She don't want no showing up. She followed me up. She says it's urgent."

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Tony was very thin and very white. He had suffered. He had stood at the bedside of Dick and listened to her while she babbled and watched her hesitating on the threshold of the door which opens so often but through which no one ever returns. He put his shoe down, rolled down the sleeve of his dressing-gown and went quickly in to the sitting-room. The word urgent had been used too frequently lately.

He saw a quiet woman, not young, dressed as country girls dress on Sundays. "I come from Park Court, sir."

Tony took a step back.

"Why?" he asked.

"You *are* Mr. Antony Okehampton, are you not, sir?"

"Yes," said Tony. "Why?"

"Dr. Leverett sent me, sir. It appears that 'e knows you at the club. I called him in to Mrs. Okehampton last night, sir, not being able to make anything of 'er meself. If you wish to 'ave a word with my mistress before she goes, sir, I think you'd better——"

"I'm afraid I—that is—very well. Wait for me."

Tony dressed himself for the street not quite so carefully as usual. He had intended to celebrate the receipt of that letter by wearing a new tie, blue with white spots. He wore an old one which was merely blue. And then he led the way downstairs and into Brewer Street, and so to Regent Street. He hailed a taxi, told the driver where to go and was silent. The woman talked. In an every-day, commonplace way, going into details with a sort of relish, she told Tony

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what had been happening at Park Court since she had been housemaid there. Not once had her mistress been dressed for a many weeks. Tony could have told this woman all these things and many more.

Dr. Leverett came into the hall. He had sometimes played billiards with Tony. It seemed odd to meet like this. "Oh, yes, good-morning," he said. "I'm glad you were in. There is just time. Not much more than that. She asked for you. I had not connected her with you. I'll show you the way."

"I know," said Tony.

"I beg your pardon. Call me at once if any change takes place."

"I will," said Tony.

He watched the doctor go into the room that had been his and then stood hesitatingly outside the bedroom door.

Drusilla was propped up against pillows. Her head looked very large and her hair, no longer altogether red, stuck out like the hair of the woman of Somaliland. She smiled politely as Tony ventured in and endeavored to hold out her hand. "Charming weather for the ducks, I *don't* think!" she said. The voice was very weak, but the enunciation as clear as ever. "I hope you'll like Quennor, and that you won't mind bats in your bedroom. There is fungus growing under your bed, but as it grows under all the beds there is no choice. You are an old school-fellow of my husband, are you not? Dear old Tony, the white man, everybody's friend." Her laugh was very unpleasant. "Forgive my not being dressed. People call me an in-

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valid, you know. They might just as well call me a morphia maniac. Won't you sit down?"

"Thank you," said Tony. He sat down.

"You will be interested to see Tony once more. He's a drunkard, now, you know. The stucco of his breeding has crumbled. He's just a very common, coarse man."

"Oh, no!" said Tony.

"Oh, but yes," said Drusilla. "I assure you. Is there any need to do more than look at me? It is he who has brought me to this. But he's not such a drunkard as to have succeeded in drowning his vampire habits. My dear friend, dear old Tony, the white man, is perhaps the most colossal fraud of the century. If you can slip away before you see him, do. He exudes a subtle poison. You will never quite recover. Thank God I have been successful in preserving his daughters. My girls are angels. Stay and see my girls." She laughed again, but the old sting had gone. Her head sank a little and her breathing became very loud.

Tony hurried to the door and called. The doctor came at once. The two men went in together, Tony slowly.

"Ah!" said the doctor.

There was a new note in Drusilla's voice. "Oh, it's ah! is it?" she said. "I'm going, am I? Who's that over there—why, it's Tony, dear old Tony." She made a sort of claw of her hand and a look of intense supreme disappointment went all over her face. "What!" she said. "This—Tony? This clean person

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so smartly dressed that he looks as if he were going to a wedding—the drunken, blaspheming, soddened brute? Pull me up! Pull me up! My work is not finished. Some one has been giving him antidotes. Let me get at him.”

A horrible shriek rang through the flat. It was followed by a peculiar silence and then even the servants felt as people do when a thunderstorm passes and the air becomes clear.

The jetta that had been laid upon Tony Okehamp-ton was removed forever.

Harry was in Paris. At Maxim's she was called La Vierge Sage.

## CHAPTER XIII

**T**HE good people in and around Quennor, and even those who lived as far away as King's Redesborough were much interested. The man who drove ploughs up and down the rolling fields nearly always lumpy and in dry weather, before the corn shot up, very nearly white, never failed to ask the latest news of the young couple who drove up daily, sometimes twice a day, from the Unicorn in a small tub cart to inspect the alterations to three cottages which were balanced on the side of the hill below Quennor. And the wives, most of whom took in washing, and all of whom sold eggs and who managed, although never idle, to keep two good eyes on other people's business, had plenty to say. Their gossip was tinged with a little romance, with a thrill or two, because this was the couple that had occupied the doctor's house in the market square for many, many weeks, and who had been the means of bringing to King's Redesborough not one little old lady, but three, and who brought back to the place the roaring Squire of Quennor who now wore spats and had never a word for a soul.

Nothing that these people did went unreported. They were watched with growing sympathy, while the hundred stories were sifted out and the truth re-



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mained, as they walked to the doctor's house from the Unicorn and to the Unicorn from the doctor's house. As people get the temperature from a glass the town received bulletins from these four people's faces. For a fortnight the bulletins were bad. After which they improved daily. And when, finally, old Mrs. Ixmore who, happening to drive to the station, told Mrs. William Ixmore, Mrs. James Ixmore and Mrs. Isaac Ixmore that the Squire, who never had a word for a soul, had presented the Institute with a three-quarter sized billiard table and had led the three little old ladies up to the woods, dogs seemed to bark louder and cocks to crow more shrilly and the clock over the market place to strike with his old accustomed confidence.

A fortnight later the Unicorn lost its visitors. One afternoon a wagonette fetched them away and there were many last words before it drove off to the station.

And then one morning the Squire, who now had a word for everybody, passed on the tips of his toes along the High Street and into the yard of the man who had a tub cart for hire with a corpulent pony who loved to have his nose tickled. And as he drove out it was noticed that his hat was tilted and that a long cigar was stuck between his teeth.

There were faces at every window, old faces and young. Eyes peered from the post office, through loaves in bakers' shops, over bottled onions and packets of milk chocolate in grocers, between brass rods and hanging brooms in general shops and over the screen in the bank. And when it was found that the tub cart

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drew up outside the doctor's house it was astonishing how many people had business at the barber's. Even elderly women, little girls and elder sisters, whose eyes had just begun to rove a little, seemed to stand in need of treatment, although the barber had not acquired the art of shampooing.

And it was into a High Street almost as crowded as when the Territorials passed through and lunched on bread and beer and cheese beneath the old wood pillars of the market-place among their feeding horses that Dick, yes Dick, came feebly forth, very thin and frail, but with eyes bright and hair golden and laughter on her lips.

And when all these eyes, kind eyes, saw how the Squire took off his hat and led his girl bareheaded to the tub cart, not one of them, no not one, was dry, not even the only one of the little brown beast from the brewery who rushed out and barked at motor cyclists to the imminent danger of himself and them.

And there was another great day for these good people when the railway van set down a large bath chair at the doctor's house. Think how this incident ran through the town. Not an Ixmore of all the Ixmores could talk of anything else. "If it's fine to-morrow——"

To-morrow *was* fine, and again there might have been Territorials in the High Street. And when they saw a man with a white face, dressed in clothes which seemed too big for him, come feebly out, blinking at the sun, with one arm around Miss Dick's neck, no comments were made, because no one could find a

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voice that was quite safe to use. It was the left arm that was around Miss Dick's neck. There was an empty sleeve on the right side.

And somehow it seemed to do the town good to see Miss Dick wheeling her man about day after day. Widows and widowers, wives and husbands, unmarried girls and hobbledehoyes slanted their heads a little as the two went by. This was romance. This was better than all the stories in magazines and "Bluebells" and "Hearts to Hearts." It was very pleasant to feel that in a sort of way they were all in the story. Hadn't they all been many times to the very spot where the thing had laid all crumpled? Wasn't the doctor who had kept these two in the world their doctor? Wasn't it little Jimmy Ixmore who had brought in a loaded revolver that he had found in the ditch still loaded? Ah! It all belonged to them.

And when, finally, the bath chair was discarded for the tub, and even the Captain, as he was called, drove it with his one hand up to the hill, the Ixmores and the mere few remaining people of King's Redesborough congratulated themselves upon the fact that they were going to see the rest of the romance worked out. "What do you think, my dear! Them two is a re-buildin' them cottages on the 'ill. It's a fact."

It was not before the three cottages, all washed with yellow ocher, with a new window here and there in the thatch, and all the old beams inside glowing, were satisfactorily knocked into one and furnished with good old pieces and shining warming pans that Dick and Jack moved in.

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They stood together, close together, with confetti down their necks and the clang of old bells in their ears. This was home.

It was then that Dick, with the sun shining on her golden head and her eyes no longer empty, put the cuff of the empty sleeve to her lips.

"It was a miracle," she said.

Jack nodded. He was a tanned Jack and he had grown a mustache. What was the use of looking like a sailor when he had lost the sea?

"I think I was more or less out of my mind, Dick," he said. "When I left home the car somehow brought me to Quennor. Every tree told me that what was said was a lie, but you had gone with that Frenchman. I don't know what I did. I suppose I put the car up somewhere. I remember wandering about. I believe I felt something heavy in my jacket. Nothing seemed to matter that night. Why, I even forgot mother!—The thing was very cold against my forehead."

"It was a miracle," said Dick. She put her head down on his shoulder. It was good.

"Why? What's that in your hand?" asked Jack.

"Oh, yes, this. Read it."

It was a letter. This is how it ran:

Good luck, my dear. I only want you to be happy. Never give me another thought. Yes, give me one. Come and drop one of your wild violets on me when my time comes.

Billy Thoresby.

"Keep that," said Jack. "What about that mys-

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terious room that I've never been allowed to see? Is there anything to pay to go in?"

"Not for you, Jacko. I've paid and shall always pay. Like to see it?"

"Rather!"

"Come on, then."

Away she went upstairs, a narrow winding stairs, through door after door. Then she waited. It was a room in the third cottage, a built-out room. Dick had had big windows put into three of its walls. Through the middle one there was the sun, and through all three God's country spread out like a carpet beneath the sky.

The room had nothing in it except a large solemn book. It lay open on a window seat.

"My school-room," said Dick.

"The very book?"

"Yes, the very one."

He went down on his knees beside her, and followed her finger.

And all wept, and bewailed her; but he said, Weep not; she is not dead, but sleepeth.

And they laughed him to scorn, knowing that she was dead.

And he put them all out, and took her by the hand, and called, saying, Maid, arise.

And her spirit came again, and she arose straight way—

FINIS.













